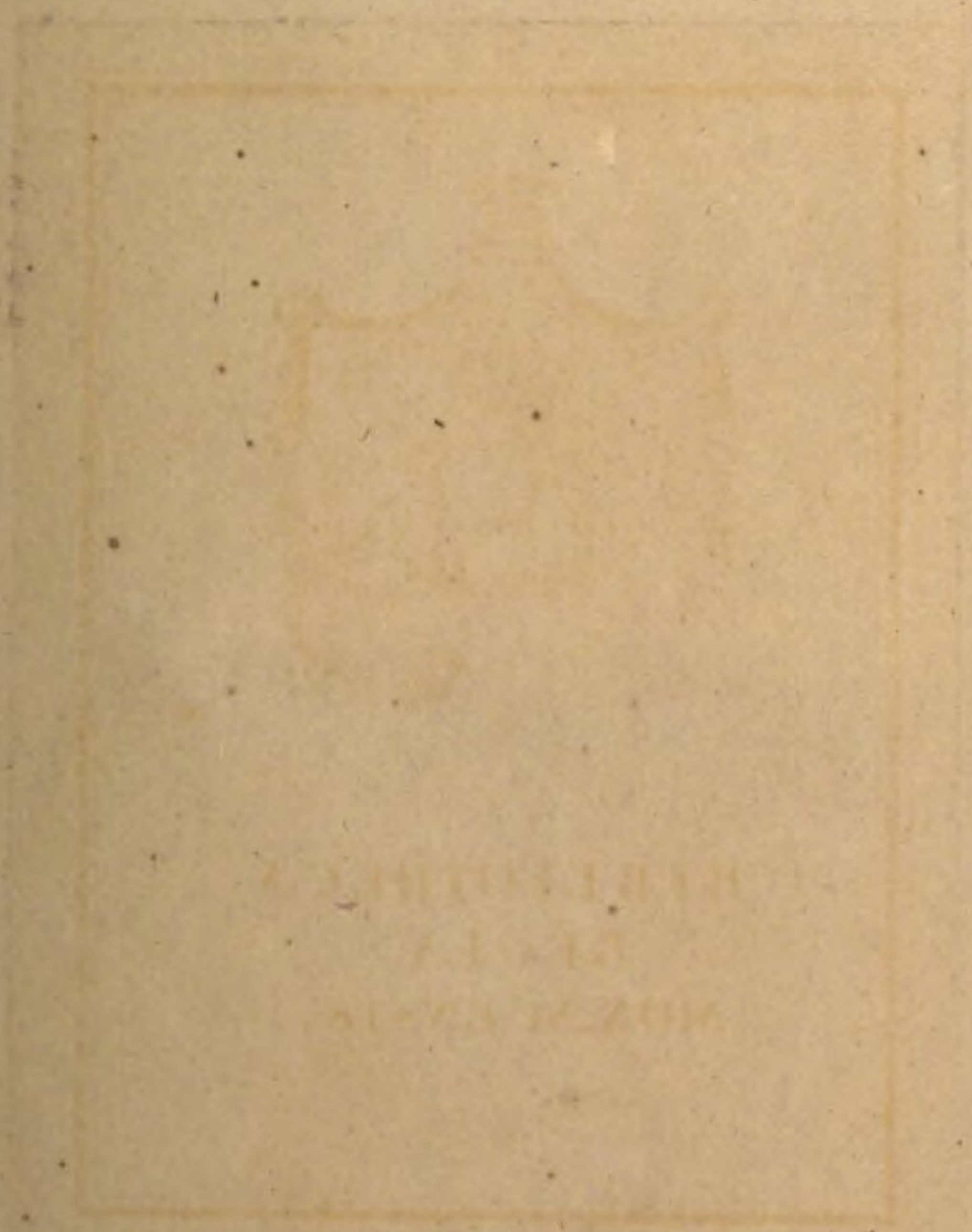


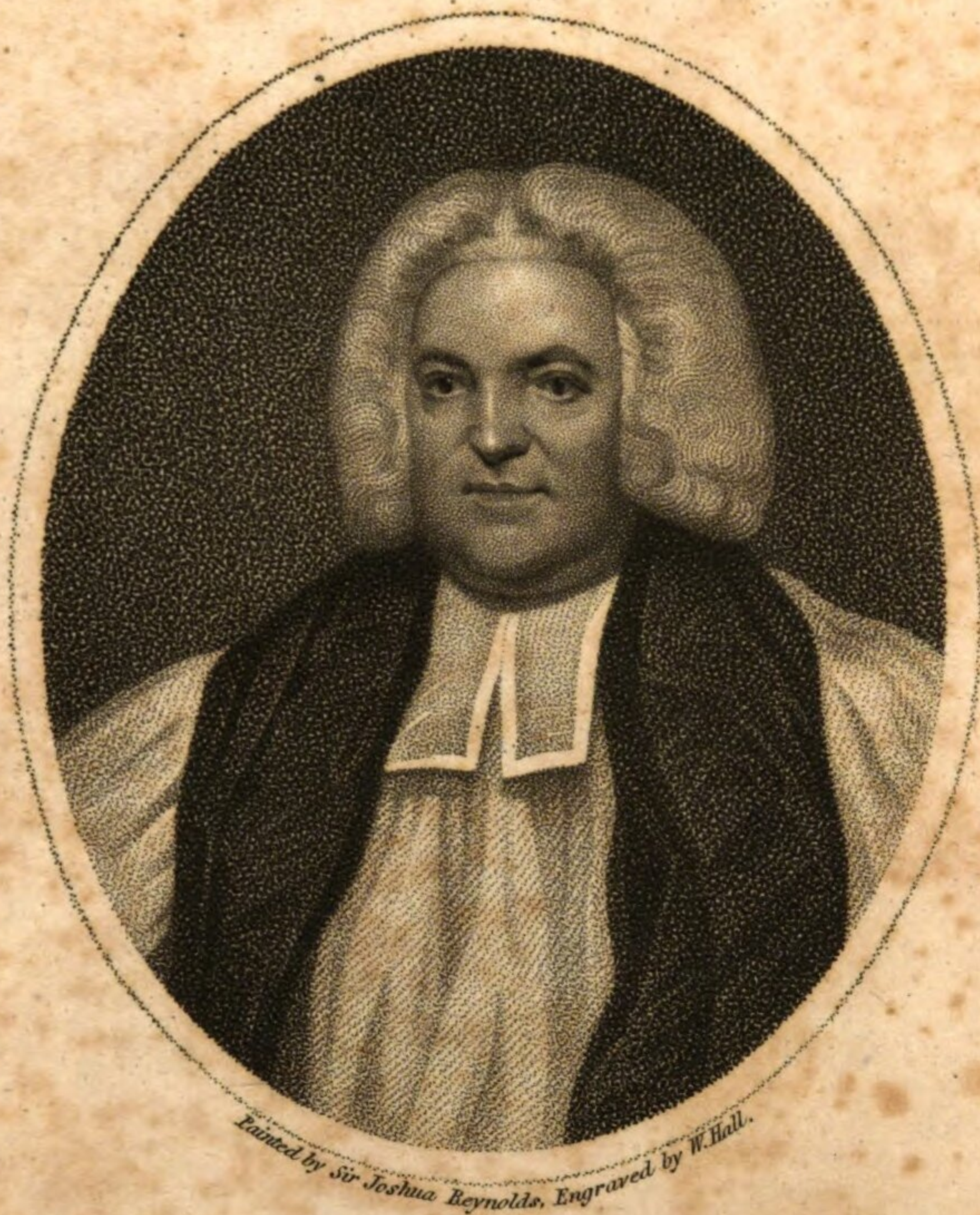
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*Thomas Secker, L.L.D.
Archbishop of Canterbury*

THE
WORKS
OF
THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.
LATE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,
A
REVIEW OF
HIS GRACE'S LIFE AND CHARACTER,
BY BEILBY PORTEUS, D.D.
LATE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON

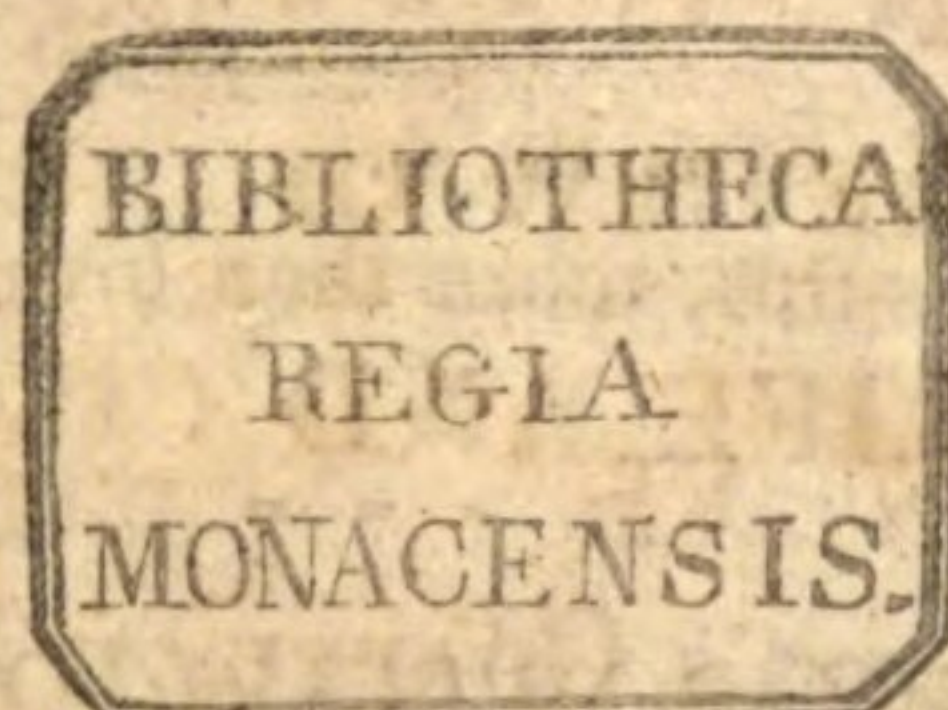
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LIFE OF ARCHBISHOP SECKER.

REVIEW

OF THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

ARCHBISHOP SECKER.

DR. THOMAS SECKER, late Archbishop of Canterbury, was born in the year 1693, at a small village called Sibthorp, in the vale of Belvoir, Nottinghamshire. His father was a Protestant Dissenter, a pious, virtuous, and sensible man, who, having a small paternal fortune, followed no profession. His mother was the daughter of Mr. George Brough, of Shelton, in the county of Nottingham, a substantial gentleman-farmer. He received his education at several private schools and academies in the country, being obliged by various accidents to change his masters frequently. Notwithstanding this evident disadvantage, at the age of nineteen he had not only made a considerable progress in Greek and Latin, and read the best and most difficult writers in both languages, but had acquired a knowledge of French, Hebrew, Chaldee, and Syriac, had learned geography, logic, algebra, geometry, conic sections, and gone through a course of lectures on Jewish antiquities, and other points, preparatory to the critical study of the Bible. At the same time, in one or other of those seminaries, he had the good fortune to meet, and to form an acquaintance, with several persons of great abilities. Amongst the rest, in the academy of one Mr. Jones, kept first at Gloucester,

then at Tewkesbury, he laid the foundation of a strict friendship with Mr. Joseph Butler, afterwards bishop of Durham. At the last of those two places it was that Mr. Butler gave the first proof of his great sagacity and depth of thought in the letters which he then wrote to Dr. Samuel Clarke; laying before him the doubts that had arisen in his mind, concerning the conclusiveness of some arguments in the Doctor's Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God. These were written with so much candour, modesty, and good sense, that, on the discovery of his name, they immediately procured him the friendship of that eminent man, and were afterwards printed at the end of his Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion. This correspondence was entrusted in confidence to Mr. Secker, who, in order to keep it private, undertook to convey Mr. Butler's letters to the Post-office at Gloucester, and to bring back Dr. Clarke's answers.

Mr. Secker had been destined by his father for orders amongst the Dissenters. With this view, during the last years of his education, his studies were chiefly turned towards divinity; in which he made such quick advances, that, by the time he was three-and-twenty, he had read over carefully a great part of the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament in the original, and the best comments upon it; Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History, the Apostolical Fathers, Whiston's Primitive Christianity, and the principal writers for and against ministerial and lay conformity; with many others of the most esteemed treatises in theology. But though the result of these enquiries was (what might naturally be expected) a well-grounded belief of the Christian revelation, yet not being at that time able to decide on some abstruse speculative doctrines, nor to determine absolutely what communion he should em-

brace ; he resolved, like a wise and honest man, to pursue some profession, which should leave him at liberty to weigh these things more maturely in his thoughts, and not oblige him to declare, or teach publicly, opinions which were not yet thoroughly settled in his own mind. Therefore about the end of the year 1716, he applied himself to the study of physic ; and after gaining all the insight into it he could, by reading the usual preparatory books, and attending the best lectures during that and the following winter in London ; in order to improve himself still more, in January 1718-19, he went to Paris. There he lodged *au Cloître St. Benoit, Rue des Mathurins*, in the same house with Mr. Winslow, the famous anatomist, whose lectures he attended, as he did those of the *Materia Medica*, Chemistry, and Botany, at the King's gardens. The operations of Surgery he saw at the *Hôtel Dieu*, and attended also for some time M. Gregoire, the *Accoucheur*, but without any design of ever practising that or any other branch of surgery. Here he became acquainted with Albinus, afterwards Professor at Leyden, Father Montfaucon, and several other persons of note. Here too was his first knowledge of Mr. Martin Benson, afterwards Bishop of Gloucester, one of the most agreeable and virtuous men of his time, with whom he quickly became much connected, and not many years after was united to him by the strongest bonds of affinity, as well as affection.

During the whole of Mr. Secker's continuance at Paris, he kept up a constant correspondence with Mr. Butler, who before this time had taken orders, and on the recommendation of Dr. Clarke, and Mr. Edward Talbot, son to Bishop Talbot, was appointed by sir Joseph Jekyll, Preacher at the Rolls. Mr. Butler took occasion to mention his friend Mr. Secker, without his

knowledge, to Mr. Talbot ; who promised, in case he chose to take orders in the church of England, to engage the Bishop his father to provide for him. This was communicated to Mr. Secker in a letter from Mr. Butler, about the beginning of May, 1720. He had not at that time come to any resolution of quitting the study of physic ; but he began to foresee many obstacles to his pursuing that profession ; and having never discontinued his application to theology, his former difficulties, both with regard to conformity and some other doubtful points, had gradually lessened, as his judgment became stronger, and his reading and knowledge more extensive. It appears also from two of his letters still in being, written from Paris to a friend in England, (both of them prior to the date of Mr. Butler's abovementioned) that he was greatly dissatisfied with the divisions and disturbances which at that particular period prevailed amongst the Dissenters. In this state of mind Mr. Butler's unexpected proposal found him, which he was therefore very well disposed to take into consideration ; and after deliberating carefully on the subject of such a change for upwards of two months, he resolved at length to embrace the offer, and for that purpose quitted France the latter end of July, or beginning of August, 1720.

On his arrival in England he was introduced to Mr. Talbot, with whom he cultivated a close acquaintance. But it was unfortunately of very short duration. For in the month of December that gentleman caught the small pox, and died. This was a great shock to all his friends, who had justly conceived the highest expectations of him, but especially to an amiable lady whom he had lately married, and who was very near sinking under so sudden and grievous a stroke. Mr. Secker, besides sharing largely in the common grief,

had peculiar reason to lament an accident that seemed to put an end at once to all his hopes ; but he had taken his resolution, and he determined to persevere. It was some encouragement to him to find that Mr. Talbot had on his death-bed recommended him, together with Mr. Benson and Mr. Butler, to his father's notice. Thus did that excellent young man, (for he was but twenty-nine when he died) by his nice discernment of characters, and his considerate good-nature, provide most effectually in a few solemn moments for the welfare of that Church from which he himself was so prematurely snatched away ; and at the same time raised up (when he least thought of it) the truest friend and protector to his wife and unborn daughter ; who afterwards found in Mr. Secker all that tender care and assistance which they could have hoped for from the nearest relation.

It being judged necessary by Mr. Secker's friends that he should have a degree at Oxford ; and he having been informed that if he should previously take the degree of Doctor in Physic at Leyden, it would probably help him in obtaining the other, he went a little before Christmas from London to Rotterdam, and thence to Leyden. He took his degree there, March 7, 1720-1, and, as part of his exercise for it, composed and printed a dissertation *de Medicinâ Staticâ*, which is still extant, and is thought by the gentlemen of that profession, a sensible and learned performance. Gorter, in his treatise *de perspiratione insensibili*, printed at Leyden in the year 1736, makes a short but respectful mention of it in his preface. After paying a visit to Amsterdam he returned by the way of Helvoetsluys and Harwich to London, and on the 1st of April, 1721, entered himself a gentleman commoner of Exeter Col-

lege in Oxford; about a twelvemonth after which he obtained the degree of Batchelor of Arts in that University, without any difficulty, in consequence of the Chancellor's commendatory letter to the convocation. He now spent a considerable part of his time in London, where he quickly gained the esteem of some of the most learned and ingenious men of those days, particularly of Dr. Clarke, Rector of St. James's, and the celebrated Dean Berkeley, afterwards Bishop of Cloyne, with whom he every day became more delighted and more closely connected. He paid frequent visits of gratitude and friendship to Mrs. Talbot, widow of Mr. Edward Talbot, by whom she had a daughter five months after his decease. With her lived Mrs. Catherine Benson, sister to Bishop Benson, whom in many respects she greatly resembled. She had been for several years Mrs. Talbot's inseparable companion, and was of unspeakable service to her at the time of her husband's death, by exerting all her courage, activity, and good sense, (of which she possessed a large share) to support her friend under so great an affliction: and by afterwards attending her sickly infant with the utmost care and tenderness, to which under Providence, was owing the preservation of a very valuable life.

Bishop Talbot being in November 1721 appointed to the see of Durham, Mr. Secker was in December 1722 ordained Deacon by him in St. James's church, and Priest not long after in the same place, where he preached his first Sermon, March 28, 1723. The Bishop's domestic chaplain at that time was Dr. Rundle, a man of warm fancy, and very brilliant conversation, but apt sometimes to be carried by the vivacity of his wit into indiscreet and ludicrous expressions, which created him enemies, and on one occasion produced

disagreeable consequences. With him Mr. Secker was soon after associated in the Bishop's family, and both taken down by his lordship to Durham in July 1723.

On the death, of Sir George Wheeler, in 1723-4, the Bishop gave his prebend of Durham to Mr. Benson and the rectory of Houghton le Spring to Mr. Secker. This valuable piece of preferment putting it in his power to fix himself in the world in a manner agreeable to his inclinations, he soon after made a proposal of marriage to Mrs. Benson abovementioned; which being accepted, they were married by Bishop Talbot in King-street chapel, October 28, 1725. At the earnest desire of both, Mrs. Talbot and her daughter consented to live with them, and the two families from that time became one.

Not long before this, Bishop Talbot had given the rectory of Haughton near Darlington, to Mr. Butler. There was a necessity for rebuilding a great part of the parsonage-house, and Mr. Butler had neither money nor talents for that work. Mr. Secker therefore, who had his friends always in his thoughts, and was now in great favour with his patron, persuaded him to give Mr. Butler in exchange for Haughton, the rectory of Stanhope, which was of much greater value, and without any such incumbrance. In the winter of 1725-6 Mr. Butler published the first edition of his incomparable sermons. Mr. Secker took much pains to render his stile more familiar, and his meaning more obvious. Yet they were at last by many called obscure. But whatever requires attention is not of course obscure. No one (as Dr. Clarke rightly observed on this occasion) ever imputed obscurity to Euclid's Elements. Difficulties they may have, but difficulties soon mastered by the degree of attention which such subjects require.—Mr. Secker gave his friend the same

assistance in the discourse prefixed to the second edition, and also in that noble work, which he afterwards published, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature.*

He now gave up all the time he possibly could to his residence at Houghton. He applied himself with alacrity to all the duties of a country clergyman, and supported that useful and respectable character throughout with the strictest propriety. He omitted nothing which he thought could be of use to the souls and bodies of the people entrusted to his care. He brought down his conversation and his sermons to the level of their understandings; he visited them in private, he catechised the young and ignorant, he received his country neighbours and tenants kindly and hospitably, and was of great service to the poorer sort of them by his skill in physic, which was the only use he ever made of it. Though this place was in a very remote part of the world, yet the solitude of it perfectly suited his studious disposition, and the income arising from it bounded his ambition. Here he would have been content to live and die; here, as he has often been heard to declare, he spent some of the happiest hours of his life; and it was no thought or choice of his own that removed him to a higher and more public sphere. But Mrs. Secker's health, which began now to be very bad, and was thought to have been injured by the dampness of the situation, obliged him to think of exchanging it for a more healthy one. And Dr. Finney, Prebendary of Durham, and Rector of Ryton, being old and infirm, Mr. Benson requested the Bishop, through Dr. Rundle, that Mr. Secker might succeed him, and resign Houghton. This meeting with difficulties, Mr. Benson, in order to remove them, very generously gave up his prebend of Sarum, to accommodate the

person for whom Ryton was designed, and then Mr. Secker was allowed to make the exchange abovementioned. He went up to London, and was instituted to Ryton and the prebend, June 3, 1727, and for the two following years lived chiefly at Durham, going over every week to officiate at Ryton, and spending there two or three months together in the summer.

In July 1732, the Duke of Grafton then Lord Chamberlain, appointed him chaplain to the King. For this favour he was indebted to Dr. Sherlock, who having heard him preach at Bath, had conceived the highest opinion of his abilities, and thought them well worthy of being brought forward into public notice. From that time an intimacy commenced betwixt them, and he received from that great prelate many solid proofs of esteem and friendship.

His month of waiting at St. James's happened to be August, and on Sunday the 27th of that month he preached before the Queen, the King being then abroad. A few days after, her Majesty sent for him into her closet, and held a long and gracious conversation with him. In the course of it he took an opportunity of mentioning to her his friend Mr. Butler. The Queen said, she thought he had been dead. Mr. Secker assured her he was not. Yet her majesty afterwards asked Archbishop Blackburne if he was not dead? His answer was; No, Madam, but he is buried. And indeed the retirement of Stanhope, where he spent almost his whole time, was too solitary for his disposition, which had in it a natural cast of gloominess. And though these recluse hours were by no means lost either to private improvement or public utility, yet he felt at times, very painfully, the want of that select society of friends, to which he had been accustomed, and which could inspire him with the greatest

cheerfulness. Mr. Secker, who knew this, was extremely anxious to draw him out into a more active and conspicuous scene, and omitted no opportunity of expressing this desire to such as he thought capable of promoting it. And not long after this, on Mr. Talbot's being made Lord Chancellor, he found means to have Mr. Butler recommended to him for his chaplain. His lordship accepted and sent for him. This promotion bringing him back into the world, the Queen very soon appointed him her Clerk of the Closet, from whence he rose, as his talents became more known, to those high dignities which he afterwards enjoyed.

Mr. Secker now began to have a public character, and stood high in the estimation of those who were allowed to be the best judges of merit. He had already given proofs of abilities that plainly indicated the eminence to which he must one day rise, as a preacher and a divine; and it was not long before an opportunity offered of placing him in an advantageous point of view. Dr. Tyrwhit, who succeeded Dr. Clarke as Rector of St. James's in 1729, found that preaching in so large a church endangered his health. Bishop Gibson therefore, his father-in-law, proposed to the crown that he should be made residentiary of St. Paul's, and that Mr. Secker should succeed him in the rectory. This arrangement was so acceptable to those in power, that it took place without any difficulty. Mr. Secker was instituted rector the 18th of May 1733, and in the beginning of July went to Oxford to take his degree of Doctor of Laws, not being of sufficient standing for that of Divinity. On this occasion it was that he preached his celebrated Act Sermon on the advantages and the duties of academical education, which was universally allowed to be a masterpiece of sound

reasoning and just composition. It was printed at the desire of the heads of houses, and quickly passed through several editions. It is now to be found in the second collection of his Occasional Sermons, published by himself in 1766.

He was censured in a paper called *The Weekly Miscellany* for not quoting texts of Scripture in this sermon. The only notice he took of that censure was by contributing very liberally for many years towards supporting the author of it.

At his next waiting, at Hampton-court, the Queen again sent for him, and said very obliging things to him of this Sermon. And it was thought that the reputation he had acquired by it contributed not a little towards that promotion which very soon followed its publication. For in December 1734 he received a very unexpected notice, by letter, from Bishop Gibson, that the King had fixed on him to be Bishop of Bristol. Dr. Rundle had a little before this been proposed by the Lord Chancellor Talbot for the see of Gloucester, but on account of some imprudences of speech charged on the Doctor by Mr. Venn, the Bishop of London opposed this nomination, and with much difficulty prevailed on Dr. Benson to accept that dignity. Dr. Fleming was about the same time promoted to the see of Carlisle; and the three new Bishops were all consecrated together in Lambeth-chapel, Jan. 19, 1734-5, the consecration sermon being preached by Dr. Thomas, late Bishop of Winchester.

The honours to which Dr. Secker was thus raised in the prime of life did not in the least abate his diligence and attention to business; for which indeed there was now more occasion than ever. He immediately set about the visitation of his Diocese, confirm-

ed in a great number of places, preached in several Churches, sometimes twice a day, and, from the informations received in his progress, laid the foundation of a parochial account of his diocese, for the benefit of his successors. Finding, at the same time, the affairs of his parish of St. James's in great disorder, he took the trouble in concert with a few others, to put the accounts of the several officers into a regular method, drew up a set of excellent rules to direct them better for the future, and, by the large share which he always took in the management of the poor, and the regulation of many other parochial concerns, was of signal service to his parishioners, even in a temporal view. But it was their spiritual welfare which engaged, as it ought to do, his chief attention. As far as the circumstances of the times and the populousness of that polite part of the metropolis allowed, he omitted not even those private admonitions and personal applications which are often attended with the happiest effects. Not being able, however, to do so much in this way as he wished, he was peculiarly assiduous in giving and promoting every kind of public instruction. He allowed out of his own income a salary for reading early and late prayers, which had formerly been paid out of the offertory money. He held a Confirmation once every year, and examined and instructed the candidates several weeks before in the vestry, and gave them religious tracts, which he also distributed, at other times, very liberally to those that needed them. He drew up for the use of his parishioners that admirable course of Lectures on the Church Catechism, which have been lately published, and not only read them, once every week on the usual days, but also every Sunday evening, either at the church or one of the chapels belonging to it. They were received with

universal approbation, and attended regularly by persons of all ages and conditions. The judgment of the public has since confirmed the opinion of his parishioners, and established the reputation of this work, as one of the fullest, clearest, and exactest compendiums of revealed religion that the English language affords.

The Sermons which at the same time he set himself to compose were truly excellent and original. His faculties were now in their full vigour, and he had an audience to speak before that rendered the utmost exertion of them necessary. He did not however seek to gratify the higher part by amusing them with refined speculations or ingenious essays, unintelligible to the lower part, and unprofitable to both; but he laid before them all, with equal freedom and plainness, the great Christian duties belonging to their respective stations, and reproved the follies and vices of every rank amongst them without distinction or palliation. He studied human nature thoroughly in all its various forms, and knew what sort of arguments would have most weight with each class of men. He brought the subject home to their bosoms, and did not seem to be merely saying useful things in their presence, but addressing himself personally to every one of them. Few ever possessed, in a higher degree, the rare talent of touching on the most delicate subjects with the nicest propriety and decorum, of saying the most familiar things without being low, the plainest without being feeble, the boldest without giving offence. He could descend with such singular ease and felicity into the minutest concerns of common life, could lay open, with so much address, the various workings, artifices, and evasions of the human mind; that his audience often thought their own particular cases alluded to, and

heard with surprise their private sentiments and feelings, their ways of reasoning and principles of acting, exactly stated and described. His preaching was, at the same time, highly rational, and truly evangelical. He explained with perspicuity, he asserted with dignity, the peculiar characteristic doctrines of the Gospel. He inculcated the utility, the necessity of them, not merely as speculative truths, but as actual instruments of moral goodness, tending to purify the hearts, and regulate the lives of men ; and thus, by God's gracious appointment, as well as by the inseparable connection betwixt true faith and right practice, leading them to salvation

These important truths he taught with the authority, the tenderness, the familiarity, of a parent instructing his children. Though he neither possessed nor affected the artificial eloquence of an orator who wants only to amuse or to mislead, yet he had that of an honest man who wants to convince, of a Christian preacher who wants to reform and to save, those that hear him. Solid argument, manly sense, useful directions, short, nervous, striking sentences, awakening questions, frequent and pertinent applications of Scripture ; all these following each other in quick succession, and coming evidently from the speaker's heart ; enforced by his elocution, his figure, his action, and above all by the corresponding sanctity of his example, stamped conviction on the minds of his hearers, and sent them home with impressions not easy to be effaced. It will readily be imagined that with these powers he quickly became one of the most admired and popular preachers of his time. And though it is not to be expected that his Sermons will now afford the same pleasure, or produce the same effects, in the closet, that they did from the pulpit,

accompanied as they then were with all the advantages of his delivery; yet it will plainly appear, that the applause they met with was founded no less on the matter they contained, than the manner in which they were spoken.

On the death of Archbishop Wake, Dr. Potter was appointed to succeed him in the see of Canterbury, and that of Oxford was offered to Dr. Secker, who at first declined it. But at the earnest request of Bishop Sherlock, who was desirous to obtain the Bishopric of Bristol for his brother-in-law Dr. Gooch, he was at length prevailed on to accept the proposal, and was confirmed Bishop of Oxford in the month of May 1737. Towards the end of the same year died Queen Caroline, and the Sunday following Bishop Secker preached a Sermon on that occasion, at St. James's church, which the Princesses desired to see, and shewed it to the King, who read it. It was afterwards published in the second volume of his Occasional Sermons, which appeared in his life-time.

When the unfortunate breach happened betwixt the late King and the Prince of Wales, his Royal Highness having removed to Norfolk house, which is in the parish of St. James's, attended Divine Service constantly in that Church. The first time he came there, the Clerk in orders, Mr. Bonney, inadvertently begun prayers with his usual sentence of Scripture, "I will arise and go to my Father, &c." This quickly became the subject of much conversation; and an addition was made to it, that the Rector preached on the fifth Commandment, "Honour thy father and mother, &c." which was so positively asserted, that Bishop Sherlock could only defend him, by saying that he must certainly have been in a course of sermons on the Commandments, and therefore could not help

preaching upon that particular one in its turn. But the truth was, he preached on a quite different text, "The Lord is good to all, &c." and the whole sermon was on that subject. The Prince was pleased to shew his Lordship several marks of civility and condescension. He had the honour of baptizing all his Highness's children, except two; and though he did not attend his court, which was forbidden to all those who went to the King's, yet on every proper occasion he behaved with all the submission and respect due to his illustrious rank. In consequence of this, his influence with the Prince being supposed much greater than it really was, he was sent, by the King's direction, with a message to his Royal Highness; which not producing the effects expected from it, he had the misfortune to incur his Majesty's displeasure; who had been unhappily persuaded to think that he might have done more with the Prince than he did, though indeed he could not.—For this reason, and because he sometimes acted with those who opposed the court, the King did not speak to him for a great number of years.

In February 1742-3 a bill was brought into Parliament to take off the high duties on spirituous liquors, and to lay on others much lower in their room. As this alteration was thought likely to have a most pernicious effect on the health and morals of the common people, it met with a vigorous opposition in the House of Lords, especially from the Bench of Bishops, all of whom voted and several spoke against it. Amongst the latter were Bishop Sherlock and Bishop Secker: And when it passed, the Bishop of Oxford entered his dissent. Mr. Sandys was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and this was considered as his bill; yet soon after, on the death of Bishop Hough, he

very generously endeavoured, without Dr. Secker's knowledge, to obtain for him the see of Worcester. It was in the course of the same year that his Lordship received a letter from Dr. Wishart, Provost of Edinburgh college, recommending to him his brother and Mr. Wallace, deputies from the established clergy of Scotland, to promote a bill in Parliament for providing a maintenance for their widows and children, which many of them imagined the Bishops would oppose. Dr. Secker paid them all the civility, and did them all the service he could. None of the Bench opposed their bill either publickly or privately, and it was moved for by a Bishop at each of its three readings in the House of Lords.

About the middle of October, in the following year, died Sarah, Duchess dowager of Marlborough. She was buried at Blenheim, by bishop Secker, whom she had appointed one of her executors. For this choice she could have no other reason than the high opinion she entertained, in common with the rest of the world, of his understanding and integrity ; for he never paid the least court to her, either by private adulation, or by accommodating his public conduct to her Grace's political sentiments. On his being made Bishop of Oxford, she paid him some common civilities of neighbourhood, and desired, by Lord Cornbury, to see him. When he had visited her a few times, she requested him to be one of her executors, and read to him the clause in her will relating to them, in which she had given each of them £2,000, and indemnified them from any mistakes which they might honestly make. Before he gave his consent, he consulted Lord Chancellor Hardwicke upon it, who advised him to accept the trust. After this he visited her Grace occasionally every winter. She never asked him any questions,

nor gave him any hints, about the past or future disposal of his vote in Parliament. He always spoke his mind to her very freely, how much soever it differed from hers, and she bore it, for the most part, patiently. He blamed her for leaving so much of her estate to persons not related to her, and particularly for giving any thing to himself, who, he told her, was as rich as her Grace. These remonstrances she did not seem to take well, and never said any thing more to him about her will. He therefore concluded that she had struck him out from being one of her executors, but it proved otherwise. She gave each of them an additional £500. None of her money ever came into his Lordship's hands to be disposed of by him in her life-time. But he had good reason to think that she gave away large sums in charity, to the amount of several thousands every year.

Some time before this, the nation began to be alarmed with the appearances of a rebellion. About the middle of February, 1743-4, the King sent a Message to both Houses of Parliament, acquainting them, that the Pretender's son was meditating an invasion of this kingdom from the coast of France. The Bishop of Oxford took the earliest opportunity, after this declaration, of signaling his affection to the government, and exciting that of others, by composing a Sermon on the occasion, which he preached at St. James's church the 26th of the same month. A motion was soon after made in the House of Lords to attain the Pretender's son. It met with some opposition, but was strenuously supported by the friends of the constitution, and amongst others by Bishop Secker, who made a spirited extempore speech in its favour. When the rebellion actually broke out in September, 1745, he sent immediately a circular

letter upon it to his clergy, and drew up and promoted an address from them to the King. On his return to London in October, he preached the above-mentioned sermon again at his church and both his chapels, with some alterations and improvements, and leaving it to be printed, went down to a county meeting at Oxford, and back again in a few days to St. James's, when he presented his sermon to the King. It was much read and admired, and has been ranked by the best judges, amongst the first of the many excellent ones which were published on that occasion.†

In the spring of the year 1748, Mrs. Secker died of the gout in her stomach. She was a woman of great sense and merit, but of a very weak and sickly constitution. They had been married upwards of twenty years, during the greatest part of which time, her extreme bad state of health and spirits had put his affection to the severest trials; by which instead of being lessened, it seemed to become stronger every day. He attended her in all her long illnesses with the greatest care and tenderness, and was always ready to break off any engagement, any study, provided his company could procure her a moment's ease or cheerfulness.

Not long after this a bill came into the House of Lords, and afterwards passed into an act, by which all Letters of Orders to Scotch episcopal ministers, not granted by a Bishop of the Church of England or Ireland, were disallowed from Michaelmas, 1748, whether dated before that time or after. This the bishop of Oxford thought a great hardship, and spoke largely against it in the House. He was answered,

* It is now in the volume of Sermons printed by himself when Bishop of Oxford, in 1758.

but with much civility and respect, by Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, who favoured the bill. In the committee however the majority were against it, of which all the Bishops present made part. Bishop Thomas of Lincoln, also spoke against it upon the report. But there they were outvoted. Dr. Wishart, the Provost of Edinburgh college, told his Lordship afterwards that he thought the bill was too hard on the episcopal ministers, and that the Bishops had done right.

The part which Dr. Secker took in this affair did him not the least disservice with his friend the Lord Chancellor, whose sentiments he opposed; and who a little before had made a proposal to him, that if the Deanery of St. Paul's became vacant, he should take it in exchange for the Rectory of St. James's, and the Prebend of Durham. The Bishop accepted the offer, but told his Lordship he should not remind him of it, which he never did. Notwithstanding that, about two years afterwards, on the nomination of Dr. Butler, Dean of St. Paul's, to the see of Durham, Lord Hardwicke immediately wrote to the Duke of Newcastle, who was then at Hanover with the King, recommending the Bishop of Oxford for the Deanery. His Majesty consented, and he was installed in December, 1750.

It was no wonder that after presiding over so extensive and populous a parish for upwards of seventeen years, Bishop Secker should willingly consent to be released from a burden, which began now to grow too great for his strength. Some of his parishioners too had requited him but ill for the pains he sincerely took to serve them in all respects. But far the largest and most creditable part of them were duly sensible of what they owed to him: and most deeply regretted

the loss of a pastor, whose character they revered, and by whose labours and instructions they had so greatly profited. When he preached his farewell sermon, the whole audience melted into tears. He was followed with the prayers and good wishes of those whom every honest man would be most ambitious to please; and there are numbers still living, who retain a strong and grateful remembrance of his incessant and tender solicitude for their welfare.

Having now more leisure both to prosecute his own studies, and to encourage those of others, he gave Dr. Church considerable assistance, in his first and second "Vindication of the miraculous Powers, &c." against Dr. Middleton, which were published in the years 1750 and 1751; and he was of equal use to him in his "Analysis of Lord Bolingbroke's Works," which appeared a few years afterwards. About the same time began the late Archdeacon Sharp's controversy with the followers of Mr. Hutchinson, which was carried on to the end of the year 1755. The subjects of it were, the meaning of the words *Elohim* and *Berith*, the antiquity of the Hebrew language and character, the exposition of the word Cherubim. These pieces made together three volumes in octavo. Bishop Secker read over all Dr. Sharpe's papers before they went to the press, and corrected and improved them throughout.

But the ease which this late change of situation gave him was very soon disturbed by a heavy and unexpected stroke, the loss of his three friends, Bishops Butler, Benson and Berkeley, who were all cut off within the space of one year. Of these eminent men who were thus joined in death, as they had been throughout life, and with whom Bishop Secker was

most intimately connected from his earliest years, two are so well known to the world by their immortal writings, and the just applause of contemporary authors, that they need no other memorial. But the name of Benson, being written only on the hearts of those that knew him, deserves some further notice in this place.

* He was educated at the Charter-house, and removed from thence to Christ-church in Oxford, where he had several noble pupils, whose friendship and veneration for him continued to the end of life. His favourite study in early years was the Mathematics, in which he was well skilled, and had also an excellent taste for Painting, Architecture, and the other fine arts. He accompanied the late earl of Pomfret in his travels, and in Italy became acquainted with Mr. Berkeley, as he did at Paris with Mr. Secker. He was, from his youth to his latest age, the delight of all who knew him. His manner and behaviour were the result of great natural humanity, polished by a thorough knowledge of the world, and the most perfect good breeding, mixed with a dignity, which, on occasions that called for it, no one more properly supported. His piety, though awfully strict, was inexpressibly amiable. It diffused such a sweetness through his temper, and such a benevolence over his countenance, as none who were acquainted with him can ever forget. Bad nerves, bad health, and naturally bad spirits were so totally subdued by it, that he not only seemed, but in reality was, the happiest of men. He looked upon all that the world calls important, its pleasures, its riches, its various competitions, with a playful and

* This account of Bishop Benson is given in the words of a person who knew him well, and to whom this Narrative is indebted for a few other communications of the same nature.

good-humoured kind of contempt; and could make persons ashamed of their follies, by a raillery that never gave pain to any human being. Of vice he always spoke with severity and detestation, but looked on the vicious with the tenderness of a pitying angel. His turn was highly sociable, and his acquaintance very extensive. Wherever he went, he carried cheerfulness and improvement along with him. As nothing but the interests of Christianity and virtue seemed considerable enough to give him any lasting anxiety; so, on the other hand, there was no incident so trifling from which he could not raise amusement and mirth.

It was much against his will that he was appointed Bishop of Gloucester, and from that See he would never remove. He was however a vigilant and active prelate. He revived the very useful institution of rural Deans, he augmented several livings, he beautified the Church, and greatly improved the palace. It was an act of kindness to his friend which cost him his life. At the request of Dr. Secker he went from Gloucester to Bath to visit Bishop Butler, who lay ill at that place, and he found him almost at the point of death. After one day's stay there, he was obliged to go to the northern extremity of his diocese, to confirm. The fatigue of these journies, (for, according to his constant practice, he travelled on horseback) and his business together, produced an inflammation, and that a mortification, in his bowels, of which he died. The Bishop of Oxford was appointed one of his executors, with a legacy of £.300 which he refused to take.

In the beginning of the year 1753, a Bill for the Naturalization of the Jews, commonly called the Jew Bill, had passed both Houses of Parliament with little or no opposition. But a great clamour being raised against it without doors, it was thought advisable that

the duke of Newcastle should move for the repeal of it, on the first day of the session in the next winter. And he desiring to be seconded by a Bishop, Dr. Secker was fixed on for that purpose. He accordingly rose up after the Duke, and made a speech, which had the good fortune to be remarkably well received; though Lord Westmoreland said, that for some time he thought the Bishop had been speaking against the Repeal, having advanced more in favour of the Bill than he had ever heard before. He spoke afterwards for a clause to disable Jews from being patrons of livings, which some thought they might; but the desire of the House for the simple repeal prevailed, and he was advised not to divide it on the clause. On this occasion it was that he vindicated his friend Dr. Sherlock, with great spirit, against some severe attacks made upon him by a noble lord in relation to this Bill; for which generous proceeding he had the Bishop's thanks.

During the whole time that he was Dean of St. Paul's, he attended divine service constantly in that Cathedral twice every day, whether in residence or not; and, in concert with the other three residentiaries, established the custom of always preaching their own turns in the afternoon, or exchanging with each other only; which, excepting the case of illness, or extraordinary accidents, was very punctually observed. The fund, appropriated to the repairs of the Church, having by neglect and wrong management fallen into much confusion, he took great pains in examining the accounts, reducing payments, making a proper division of expence betwixt the Dean and Chapter on one side, and the three Trustees on the other, and prevailing on the latter to agree to that division; by which means the fund was put on such a footing, that it encreased afterwards considerably, and promised to be sufficient

for the purposes it was designed to answer. In the following year he was engaged in another very troublesome transaction, making an agreement with the inhabitants of St. Faith's parish, concerning their share of St. Paul's church-yard. And he left behind him a great number of papers relative to both these points. He procured the old writings of the Church to be put in order, and an index made to them. He collated a copy of the old Statute-book, as it is called, with that which is used as the original, and corrected a multitude of mistakes in that transcript. He examined also the registers and books in the Chapter-house, extracted out of them what seemed material, and left the extracts in the hands of his successor.

In the summer months he resided constantly at his episcopal house at Cuddesden. The vicinity of that place to the University of Oxford, and the natural connection which his station gave him with the members of that learned body, could not but be very pleasing to a man of his literary turn. Yet his situation, agreeable and honourable as it was to him, had notwithstanding its difficulties. To appear with any considerable degree of credit amongst so many men of the first eminence for genius and erudition, and to preserve the reverence due to the character of a diocesan, amidst such violent party-dissensions as at that time unhappily prevailed there, required no small share of ability and prudence. Dr. Secker however had the good fortune to succeed in both those points. His house was the resort of those who were most distinguished for academical merit, and his conversation such as was worthy of his guests, who always left him with a high esteem of his understanding and learning. And though in the warm contest in 1754, for representatives of the county, (in which it was scarce possi-

ble for any person of eminence to remain neuter) he openly espoused that side which was thought most favourable to the principles of the Revolution ; yet it was without bitterness or vehemence, without ever departing from the decency of his profession, the dignity of his station, or the charity prescribed by his religion. On the contrary, along with the truest affection to the government, (though he was then under the displeasure of the Court) he preserved at the same time so much good temper and good will towards the opposite party ; took such unwearied pains to soften the violent prejudices conceived against them by the administration ; and shewed on all proper occasions so cordial and friendly a concern for the welfare and honour of the whole University ; that they, who most disliked his political tenets, could not help acknowledging his candour and moderation. The same prudent conduct in this respect which he observed himself, he recommended to his clergy in that memorable passage towards the conclusion of his fifth Charge, which struck the hearers by its novelty and propriety at the time in a very remarkable manner, and is well worthy the serious perusal of all who happen to be in similar circumstances. Indeed the whole series of those excellent charges, which he delivered in the course of his governing that diocese, were listened to by a very learned and critical audience with peculiar marks of attention and regard. The first of them, which contains directions for regulating the studies, the temper, and general conduct of the clergy, was printed soon after it was spoken, and passed through several editions. Having in this considered them as ministers of the Gospel at large, in his subsequent ones he proceeded to consider them as ministers of the several parishes in which they officiated ; and descended to more

particular directions, both with regard to the discharge of their spiritual functions, and also the care of their temporalities, their incomes, churches, lands, and houses.

But words were not the only persuasives he made use of. He enjoined no duty, he imposed no burthen on those under his jurisdiction, which he had not formerly undergone, or was not still ready, as far as it became him, to undergo. He preached constantly in his church at Cuddesden every Sunday morning, and read a lecture on the Catechism in the evening; (both which he continued to do in Lambeth Chapel after he became Archbishop;) and in every other respect, within his own proper department, was himself that devout, discreet, disinterested, laborious, conscientious pastor, which he wished and exhorted every clergyman in his diocese to become.

A conduct like this could not fail of attracting the notice and esteem of all those who wished well to the cause of learning and religion, in whose thoughts he had been long marked out for the highest honours of his profession. He continued notwithstanding in the see of Oxford upwards of twenty years; going on that whole time in the same even course of duty, and enjoying with the highest relish those leisure hours, which his retirement at Cuddesden sometimes afforded him, for the prosecution of his favourite studies. At length however his distinguished merit prevailed over all the political obstacles to his advancement; and placed him, without any effort or application of his own, in that important station which he had shewn himself so well qualified to adorn. For within a very few days after the death of Archbishop Hutton, he received a message from the Duke of Newcastle, acquainting him that his Grace had proposed him to the

King for the vacant See of Canterbury. He returned the Duke a short note of thanks, expressing at the same time his wishes that his Majesty might fix on a properer person. Soon after this his Grace desired an interview with the Bishop, at which he informed his lordship that the King had appointed him Archbishop. This promotion accordingly took place, and he was confirmed at Bow-church, April 21, 1758.

In accepting this high and burthensome station Dr. Secker acted on that principle which influenced him through life ; he sacrificed his own ease and comfort to considerations of public utility. Apart from this, the mere secular advantages of grandeur were objects below his ambition ; were, as he knew and felt, but poor compensations for the anxiety and difficulties attending them. His idea of these things was always the same with that which is expressed in his intended speech to the convocation of 1761 ; “ Non sunt, ex-
“ *perto credite, non sunt tanti vel honores vel reditus*
“ *amplissimi ecclesiasticis destinati, ut a quopiam*
“ *enixè cupiantur. Multum habent solitudinis, non*
“ *parum forsan invidiæ, veræ delectationis nihil, nisi*
“ *quoties occurrit, occurrit autem raro, insignis bene-*
“ *faciendi occasio.*” * These were not mere words of course ; they were the genuine sentiments of his heart ; his whole conduct bore testimony to the sincerity with which he spoke. He had never once through his whole life asked preferment for himself, nor shewn any unbecoming eagerness for it ; and the use he made of his newly acquired dignity very clearly shewed, that rank, and wealth, and power had in no other light any charms for him, than as they enlarged the sphere of his active and industrious benevolence.

The first thing that engaged his attention was the

* *Oratio Synodalis*, p. 368, 369.

care of his new diocese, which he immediately visited. And finding that partly the real, and partly the presumed, unwholesomeness of some parts of it had deterred too many from living on their benefices, he made this the first article of his charge, and pressed the necessity of residence upon his Clergy, in the strongest yet the most affectionate terms.* But whenever particular circumstances rendered the personal presence of the minister himself clearly impracticable, he then earnestly recommended peculiar care in the choice of a substitute ; and so much tenderness and liberality in the provision made for him as might be some compensation for the unhealthiness or disagreeableness of his situation.† Yet as this would, he knew bear hard on some incumbents, whose small preferments, or narrow circumstances, or numerous families, obliged them to obtain help on as easy terms as they well could ; in such cases he frequently made an addition himself to the curate's salary, and as a still further encouragement, rewarded occasionally with preferment, those who had resided long upon their cures, and performed their duty well ; especially in unwholesome places.

In little more than two years after his Grace's promotion to the see of Canterbury, died the late King George the Second. Of what passed on that occasion, and of the form observed in proclaiming our present most gracious Sovereign, (in which the Archbishop of course took the lead) his Grace has left an account in writing. He did the same with regard to the subsequent ceremonials of marrying and crowning their present Majesties, which in consequence of his station he had the honour to solemnize, and in which he found a great

* First charge to the Diocese of Canterbury, p. 207—219.

† Ibid. p. 219—222.

want of proper precedents and directions. He had before, when Rector of St. James's, baptized the new king (who was born in that parish) and he was afterwards called upon to perform the same office for the greatest part of his Majesty's children;—a remarkable, and perhaps unexampled, concurrence of such incidents in the life of one man.

From the time that he was made Dean of St. Paul's his late Majesty used to speak to him at his levee occasionally, but with no particular marks of distinction. But after he became Archbishop, the King treated him with much kindness, and on one occasion was pleased to assure him very particularly, that he was perfectly satisfied with the whole of his conduct in that station. And surely his Majesty, as well as all his people, has good reason to be so. For never did any one support the rank, or discharge the various duties, of a metropolitan, with more true dignity, wisdom, and moderation, than Archbishop Secker*. He considered himself as the natural guardian, not only of that Church, over which he presided, but of learning, virtue, and religion at large; and, from the eminence on which he was placed, looked round with a watchful eye on every thing that concerned them, embracing readily all fit opportunities to promote their interest, and opposing, as far as he was able, all attempts to injure them.

* *Ecquâ vero in parte spem nostram fefellit? imo vero exsuperavit. Sine offensione partium, sine invidiâ, sine ambitione, ecclesiæ principatum adeptus, sine arrogantia cum dignitate verâ sustinuit; magni vir animi, & verè ἀρχιεπίσκοπος, qui politiam ecclesiasticam animo complectebatur, consilio dirigebat, auctoritate tuebatur, exemplo ornabat; in negotiis impiger & indefessus, nihil a se alienum putabat quod ad clericorum jura, mores, famamque pertinebat; auctoritate ita usus ut nihil pro libidine aut insolentiâ imperii affectaret, sed omnia ad οἰκονομίαν communesque ecclesiæ utilitates referret. *Johannis Burton ad amicum epistola*, p. 14. Printed at Oxford, in 1768, and sold by Rivington.*

Men of real genius or extensive knowledge, he sought out and encouraged. Even those of humbler talents, provided their industry was great, and their intentions good, he treated with kindness and condescension. Both sorts he would frequently employ in undertakings suited to their respective abilities, and rewarded them in ways suited to their respective wants. He assisted them with books, promoted subscriptions to their works, contributed largely to them himself, talked with them on their private concerns, entered warmly into their interests, used his credit for them with the great, gave them preferments of his own. He expended upwards of £300, in arranging and improving the manuscript library at Lambeth. And having observed with concern, that the library of printed books in that palace had received no accessions since the time of Archbishop Tennyson, he made it his business to collect books in all languages from most parts of Europe at a very great expense, with a view of supplying that chasm; which he accordingly did, by leaving them to the library at his death, and thereby rendered that collection one of the noblest and most useful in the kingdom.

All designs and institutions that tended to advance good morals and true religion he patronised with zeal and generosity. He contributed largely to the maintenance of schools for the poor, to rebuilding or repairing parsonage houses and places of worship, and gave at one time no less than £500 towards erecting a chapel in the parish of Lambeth, to which he afterwards added near £100 more. To the society for promoting Christian knowledge he was a liberal benefactor: and to that for propagating the Gospel in foreign parts, of which he was the president, he paid much attention; was constant at all the meetings of

its members, (even sometimes when his health would but ill permit it) and superintended their deliberations with consummate prudence and temper. He was sincerely desirous to improve to the utmost that excellent institution, and to diffuse the knowledge and belief of Christianity as wide as the revenues of the society, and the extreme difficulty of establishing schools and missions amongst the Indians, and of making any effectual and durable impressions of religion on their uncivilized minds, would admit. But Dr. Mayhew, of Boston in New-England, having in an angry pamphlet accused the society of not sufficiently answering these good purposes, and of departing widely from the spirit of their charter; with many injurious reflections interspersed on the Church of England, and the design of appointing Bishops in America; his Grace on all these accounts thought himself called upon to confute his invectives, which he did in a short anonymous piece, entitled, “An Answer to Dr. Mayhew’s Observations on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for propagating the Gospel;” printed for Rivington in 1764, and reprinted in America. The strength of argument, as well as fairness and good temper, with which this answer was written, had a considerable effect on all impartial men, and even on the Doctor himself, who plainly perceived that he had no common adversary to deal with; and could not help acknowledging him to be “a person of excellent sense, and a happy talent
“at writing; apparently free from the sordid illiberal
“spirit of bigotry; one of a cool temper, who often
“shewed much candour, was well acquainted with
“the affairs of the society, and in general a fair
“reasoner.”*

He was therefore so far wrought upon by his “worthy

* Mayhew’s Remarks on an anonymous Tract, &c. P. 3.

answerer,"* as to abate much in his reply of his former warmth and acrimony. But as he still would not allow himself to be "wrong in any material point,"† nor forbear giving way too much to reproachful language and ludicrous representations, he was again animadverted upon by Mr. Apthorpe, in a sensible tract entitled, "A Review of Dr. Mayhew's Remarks, &c." printed also for Rivington, in 1765. This put an end to the dispute. The doctor on reading it declared he should not answer it, and the following year he died.

It appeared evidently in the course of this controversy, that Dr. Mayhew, and probably many other worthy men amongst the Dissenters both at home and abroad, had conceived very unreasonable and groundless jealousies of the Church of England, and its governors; and had in particular greatly misunderstood the proposal for appointing Bishops in some of the colonies. The chief reasons for desiring an establishment of this nature, were, the want of persons vested with proper authority, to administer to the members of the Church of England the antient and useful office of confirmation; to superintend the conduct of the episcopal clergy; and to save candidates for the ministry the trouble, cost, and hazard of coming to England for ordination. It was alledged, that the expence of crossing the Atlantic for that purpose could not be less than £100. that near a fifth part of those who took that voyage had actually lost their lives; and that, in consequence of these discouragements, one half of the churches in several provinces were destitute of clergymen. Common humanity, as well as common justice, pleaded strongly for a remedy to these evils; and there appeared to be no other effectual re-

* Mayhew's Remarks on an Anonymous Tract, &c. p. 85.

† Ibid. p. 87.

remedy but the appointment of one or more Bishops in some of the episcopal colonies. The dangers and inconveniencies, which the Dissenters seemed to apprehend from that measure, were thought to be effectually guarded against by the mode of appointment which was proposed. What that mode was, may be seen in the following extract from the Archbishop's answer to Dr. Mayhew, in which he explains concisely and clearly the only plan for such an establishment that was ever meant to be carried into execution.

“ The Church of England is, in its constitution,
“ episcopal. It is, in some of the plantations, con-
“ fessedly the established Church: in the rest are
“ many congregations adhering to it; and through the
“ late extension of the British dominions, it is likely
“ that there will be more. All members of every
“ church are, according to the principles of liberty,
“ entitled to every part of what they conceive to be
“ the benefits of it, entire and complete, so far as
“ consists with the welfare of civil government. Yet
“ the members of our church in America do not thus
“ enjoy its benefits, having no protestant Bishop with-
“ in three thousand miles of them; a case which
“ never had its parallel before in the christian world.
“ Therefore it is desired that two or more Bishops
“ may be appointed for them, to reside where his
“ Majesty shall think most convenient: that they may
“ have no concern in the least with any persons who
“ do not profess themselves to be of the Church of
“ England, but may ordain ministers for such as do;
“ may confirm their children when brought to them at
“ a fit age for that purpose; and take such oversight
“ of the episcopal clergy, as the Bishop of London's
“ commissaries in those parts have been empowered
“ to take, and have taken without offence. But it is

“ not desired in the least that they should hold courts
 “ to try matrimonial or testamentary causes ; or be
 “ vested with any authority now exercised, either by
 “ provincial governors, or subordinate magistrates ;
 “ or infringe or diminish any privileges and liberties,
 “ enjoyed by any of the laity, even of our own
 “ communion. This is the real and the only scheme
 “ that hath been planned for Bishops in America ; and
 “ whoever hath heard of any other, hath been misin-
 “ formed through mistake or design.”* And as to the
 place of their residence, his Grace further declares,
 “ that it neither is, nor ever was intended or desired
 “ to fix one in New-England ; but episcopal colonies
 “ have always been proposed.”†

The Doctor on reading this account confessed,‡
 that if it were the true one, “ he had been misinformed
 “ himself, and knew of others who had been so in
 “ common with him ; and that if such a scheme as
 “ this were carried into execution, and only such con-
 “ sequences were to follow, as the proposer had pro-
 “ fessedly in view, he could not object against it, ex-
 “ cept on the same principle that he should object
 “ against the Church of England in general.”§

As it came however from an unknown writer, he
 thought himself at liberty to consider it as nothing
 more than the imaginary scheme of a private man, till
 it was confirmed by better authority.¶ It now appears
 to have come from the best authority, and it is certain
 that this mode of establishing Bishops in America, was
 not invented merely “ to serve a present turn,¶ being
 precisely the same with that proposed by Bishop
 Butler twenty years ago ;** and with that mentioned

* Answer to Mayhew, p. 59.
 an Anonymous Tract, &c. p. 59.

† Ib. 66.

‡ Remarks on

§ Ib. p. 79.

¶ Ib. p. 61.

¶ Ibid. p. 61.

** See Apthorpe's Review of Dr. Mayhew's Remarks, p. 55.

by his Grace, in his letter to the Right Honourable Horatio Walpole, Esquire, written when he was Bishop of Oxford, and published since his death * by his executors, Mrs. Catherine Talbot, and Dr. Daniel Burton ; in which the whole affair is set in a right point of view, his own sentiments upon it more fully explained, and an answer given to the chief objections against such a proposal.

It is not necessary to enter here into the merits of this question. It is before the public, and every one is enabled to judge for himself. But thus much, it is presumed, may safely be inferred from the account here given of it ; (which is the true one ;) that the mere proposal of such an appointment, or rather the encouragement of what had been long before proposed, is not a crime of quite so unpardonable a nature, as the Archbishop's adversaries have been pleased to represent it. Posterity will stand amazed, when they are told, that on this account his memory has been pursued in pamphlets and news-papers with such unrelenting rancour, such unexampled wantonness of abuse, as he would scarce have deserved, had he attempted to eradicate Christianity out of America, and to introduce Mahometanism in its room : whereas, the plain truth is, that all he wished for, was nothing more than what the very best friends to religious freedom ever have wished for, a complete toleration for the Church of England in that country. What an idea must it give mankind of his Grace's character to have such a circumstance singled out by his bitterest revilers as the most exceptionable part of it !

But though the Archbishop was a sincere and avowed friend to that measure, yet it was by no means the only or the principal object of his concern in

* In the Year 1769 ; and sold by Rivington.

regard to the colonies. The advancement of true piety and learning, the conversion of the Indians and Negroes, as far as it was practicable, the establishment of proper schools, the distribution of useful books, the good conduct of the missionaries, the preservation of peace and harmony amongst the different religious communities in those parts of the British empire; these things had a very large share in his thoughts, and in the correspondence which he constantly kept up with a few of the ablest and worthiest men in the American provinces. The letters which he wrote to them, on these and such like subjects, are highly expressive of his pastoral character; and represent in a very pleasing light his truly benevolent disposition, his condescension to persons of the lowest station, his indefatigable application to every affair that came before him, his zeal to promote the interests of religion in general, and the Church of England in particular; not by warm and violent counsels, but by methods of tenderness and brotherly kindness towards those who embraced a different interest. Of these things the Americans will ever retain a grateful remembrance; and have, in their letters to this country, expressed their sense of his kind attention to them in the strongest and most affectionate terms.

Whenever any publications came to his knowledge that were manifestly calculated to corrupt good morals, or subvert the foundations of Christianity, he did his utmost to stop the circulation of them: yet the wretched authors themselves he was so far from wishing to treat with any undue rigour, that he has more than once extended his bounty to them in distress. And when their writings could not properly be suppressed (as was too often the case) by lawful authority,

he engaged men of abilities to answer them, and rewarded them for their trouble. His attention was every where. Even the falsehoods and misrepresentations of writers in the news-papers on religious or ecclesiastical subjects, he generally took care to have contradicted: and when they seemed likely to injure in any material degree the cause of virtue and religion, or the reputation of eminent and worthy men, he would sometimes take the trouble of answering them himself. One instance of this kind, which does him honour, and deserves mention, was his defence of Bishop Butler, who, in a pamphlet, published in the year 1767, was accused of having died a Papist. This strange slander, founded on the weakest pretences and most trivial circumstances that can be imagined, no one was better qualified to confute than the Archbishop; as well from his long and intimate knowledge of Bishop Butler, as from the information given him at the time by those who attended his Lordship in his last illness, and were with him when he died. Accordingly, by an article in a news-paper, signed *Misopseudes*, his Grace challenged the author of that pamphlet to produce his authority for what he had advanced; and in a second article defended the Bishop against him; and in a third (all with the same signature) confuted another writer, who under the name of *A real Protestant*, still maintained that ridiculous calumny. His antagonists were effectually subdued, and his superiority to them was publicly acknowledged by a sensible and candid man, who signed himself, and who really was, *A dissenting Minister*. Surely, it is a very unwise piece of policy, in those who profess themselves enemies to Popery, to take so much pains to bring the most respectable names within its pale; and to give it the merit of having

gained over those who were the brightest ornaments and firmest supports of the Protestant cause.

The welfare, the credit, the good influence of the clergy he had entirely at heart, and suffered nothing to escape his notice, that could in any proper way promote them. He earnestly endeavoured to prevent unworthy men from bringing disgrace on the profession and contempt on religion, by entering into orders. With this view it was that he so strongly recommended the greatest care and caution in signing testimonials. “They are,” says he,* “the only
“ordinary information that we have in a case of the
“utmost importance, where we have a right to be
“informed. For no one can imagine, that we are
“to ordain whoever comes, or depend on clandestine intelligence. We must therefore, and do
“depend on regular testimonials,—every part of
“which ought to be considered before it is given,
“and no consideration paid to neighbourhood, acquaintance, friendship, compassion, importunity,
“when they stand in competition with truth.—It
“may be sometimes hard for you to refuse your
“hand to improper persons; but it is only one of
“the many hardships which conscience bids men
“undergo resolutely when they are called to them.
“It would be much harder, that your Bishop should
“be misled, the Church of God injured, and the poor
“wretch himself assisted to invade sacrilegiously an
“office, at the thought of which he hath cause to
“tremble.”† If any such however had unhappily found means to obtain ordination, he did his utmost to prevent their further progress; or if that could not be done very openly signified his dislike of their con-

* First Charge to the Diocese of Canterbury, p. 222.

† Ibid, p. 226.

duct ; nor could he ever bring himself to treat them, however considerable their rank might be, with any marks of esteem or respect.

Men of worth and eminence in the Church he cherished and befriended, and endeavoured to bring forward into stations where they might be singularly useful. Above all he distinguished, with peculiar marks of his favour, the conscientious and diligent parish priest. He was of opinion, that “ the main
“ support of piety and morals consisted in the paro-
“ chial labours of the clergy ; and that, if this country
“ could be preserved from utter profligateness and
“ ruin, it must be by their means.”* For their assistance therefore in one important branch of their duty, he gave them in his third archiepiscopal Charge directions for writing and speaking sermons. The thoughts of such a man, on so nice and difficult a subject, must naturally raise some expectation, and that expectation will not be disappointed. They are the evident result of a sound judgment, matured by long experience and a thorough knowledge of mankind, and are every way worthy of one who was himself so great a master of that species of composition and elocution. It was his purpose, after speaking of stated instructions, to have gone on to occasional ones ; but he did not live, as he himself foreboded he should not, to accomplish that design.

The conduct which he observed towards the several divisions and denominations of Christians in this kingdom, was such as shewed his way of thinking to be truly liberal and catholic. The dangerous spirit of popery indeed, he thought, should always be kept under proper legal restraints, on account of its natural opposition not only to the religious, but the civil rights

* First Charge to the Diocese of Canterbury, p. 239

of mankind. He therefore observed its movements with care, and exhorted his clergy to do the same, especially those who were situated in the midst of Roman Catholic families; against whose influence they were charged to be upon their guard, and were furnished with proper books, or instructions for that purpose. He took all fit opportunities of combating the errors of the Church of Rome in his own writings;* and the best answers, which were published to some of the late bold apologies for Popery, were written at his instance, and under his direction. He had the good fortune to preserve some persons of consequence from embracing that communion, and to receive several converts from it, both of the clergy and laity, into the Church of England. When the Earl of Radnor moved in the House of Lords for an enquiry into the number of Roman Catholics in this kingdom, his Grace was very active in forwarding that measure. The return for his own diocese was no more than 271; that, for all the dioceses in England and Wales did not exceed 68,000; which even when all due allowances are made for unavoidable errors of computation in great towns, more especially in London, fell far short of what by some well meaning persons they were supposed or represented to be.† And if we further reflect how many wealthy and noble

* See particularly his Sermons on the Rebellion in 1745, on the Protestant Working-schools in Ireland, on the 5th of November, and a great number of occasional passages to the same purpose, in various parts of his Lectures, Sermons, and other works.

† Dr. Mayhew affirms, that in the year 1745 the Papists in London only were 100,000, and that the people there were said to be converted by hundreds and thousands, if not ten thousands every year. —Remarks on an Anonymous Tract, &c. p. 73. Had the good Doctor's account been true, and these conversions gone on (as some have imagined) encreasing ever since, there would hardly have been a Protestant left by this time in the metropolis.

families in these kingdoms have lately embraced the Protestant religion, each of which would probably draw after it several other converts of inferior rank, it will appear perhaps the better-grounded conjecture of the two, (for it must at last be all conjecture) that popery is rather in a declining than a progressive state amongst us. Certain at least it is, that some late events on the neighbouring continent have shaken this huge fabric of superstition to its very foundation. One of its grand supports, the society of Jesuits, is, in many places, totally subverted; and the Papal power itself is every where falling into contempt. One may therefore surely hope, that absurdities which visibly lose ground even in the most bigotted countries, will not stand much chance of retrieving their loss in this enlightened one.

But though thus prudently jealous of this corrupt church, towards his Protestant brethren of all persuasions, he demeaned himself with great mildness and moderation. One very striking proof of this occurs in the directions he gives his clergy, with regard to their conduct towards those who are commonly distinguished by the name of Methodists.* It is impossible to read that passage without acknowledging the justness of it, and conceiving the highest opinion of the writer's philanthropy and good sense.

With the Dissenters his Grace was sincerely desirous of cultivating a good understanding. - Though firmly attached to the Church of England, and ready on all proper occasions to defend its discipline and doctrines with becoming spirit; yet it never inspired him with any desire to oppress or aggrieve those of a different way of thinking, or to depart from the principles of religious liberty, by which he

* Second Archiepiscopal Charge, p. 280.

constantly regulated his own conduct,* and wished that all others would regulate theirs. He considered the Protestant Dissenters in general as a conscientious and valuable class of men, and was far from taking the spirit of certain writings to be the spirit of the whole body. With some of the most eminent of them, Watts, Doddridge, Leland, Chandler, Lardner, he maintained an intercourse of friendship or civility ; by the most candid and considerate part of them he was highly revered and esteemed ; and to such amongst them as needed help, shewed no less kindness and liberality than to those of his own communion.

Nor was his concern for the Protestant cause confined to his own country. He was well known as the great patron and protector of it in various parts of Europe ; from whence he had frequent applications for assistance, which never failed of being favourably received. To several foreign Protestants he allowed pensions, to others he gave occasional relief, and to some of their Universities was an annual benefactor.

There is therefore the utmost reason to believe that he spoke the language of his heart, in relation to these matters, in the conclusion of his answer to Dr. Mayhew ; which well deserves to be here laid at full length before the reader.

“ Our inclination is to live in friendship with all
“ the Protestant churches. We assist and protect
“ those on the continent of Europe as well as we are
“ able. We shew our regard to that of Scotland as
“ often as we have an opportunity, and believe the
“ members of it are sensible that we do. To those
“ who differ from us in this part of the kingdom, we

* A strong confirmation of these assertions may be seen in one of his Grace's Letters to Dr. Lardner, written when he was Bishop of Oxford, and preserved in the Memoirs of that learned man, which have been lately published, p. 98.

“ neither attempt nor wish any injury ; and we shall
 “ gladly give proofs to every denomination of Chris-
 “ tians in our colonies, that we are friends to a tole-
 “ ration even of the most intolerant, as far as it is
 “ safe ; and willing that all mankind should possess
 “ all the advantages, religious and civil, which they
 “ can demand either in law or reason. But with
 “ those who approach nearer to us in faith and bro-
 “ therly love, we are desirous to cultivate a freer com-
 “ munication, passing over all former disgusts, as we
 “ beg that they would. If we give them any seem-
 “ ing cause of complaint, we hope they will signify it
 “ in the most amicable manner. If they publish it,
 “ we hope they will preserve fairness and temper. If
 “ they fail in either we must bear it with patience,
 “ but be excused from replying. If any writers on
 “ our side have been less cool or less civil than they
 “ ought and designed to have been, we are sorry for
 “ it, and exhort them to change their style if they
 “ write again. For it is the duty of all men, how
 “ much soever they differ in opinion, to agree in mu-
 “ tual good will and kind behaviour.”*

This passage Dr. Mayhew himself allows† to be
 written “ in such a candid, sensible, and charitable
 “ way, as did the author great honour, shewed the
 “ amiable spirit of Christianity in an advantageous
 “ light,” and was worthy the pen of a metropolitan,
 “ whose Christian moderation,” he acknowledges to
 be “ not the least shining part of his respectable cha-
 “ racter.”‡ And it may on the best grounds be added,
 that Archbishop Secker in this place not only expressed
 his own real sentiments, but those of the present truly

* Answer to Mayhew, p. 68.

† Mayhew's Remarks on an Anonymous Pamphlet, p. 83.

‡ Ibid, p. 86.

benevolent primate, and of far the greatest part in every rank of the English clergy in general.

In public affairs his grace acted the part of an honest citizen, and a worthy member of the British legislature. From his very first entrance into the House of Peers, his parliamentary conduct was uniformly upright and noble. He kept equally clear from the two extremes of factious petulance and servile dependance; never wantonly thwarting administration, from motives of party zeal, or private pique, or personal attachment, or a passion for popularity; nor yet going every length with every minister, from views of interest or ambition. He admired and loved the constitution of his country, and wished to preserve it unaltered and unimpaired. So long as a due regard to this was maintained, he thought it his duty to support the measures of government. But whenever they were evidently inconsistent with the public welfare, he opposed them with freedom and firmness. Yet his opposition was always tempered with the utmost fidelity, respect, and decency, to the excellent prince upon the throne; and the most candid allowances for the unavoidable errors and infirmities even of the very best ministers, and the peculiarly difficult situation of those who govern a free and high-spirited people. He seldom spoke in parliament, except where the interests of religion and virtue seemed to require it; but whenever he did, he spoke with propriety and strength, and was heard with attention and deference. Though he never attached himself blindly to any one set of men, yet his chief political connections were with the late Duke of Newcastle, and Lord Chancellor Hardwicke. To these he principally owed his advancement, and he had the good fortune to live long enough to shew his gratitude to them or their descendants, particularly to the

former of them : with whose solicitations though he did not always think it necessary to comply, when that nobleman was at the head of affairs ; yet when he was out of power, the Archbishop readily embraced every opportunity of obliging him ; and gave him so many solid and undeniable proofs of friendship, that the Duke always spoke of his grace's behaviour to him in the strongest terms of approbation, and made particular mention of it to some of his friends but a very short time before his own death.

During more than ten years that Dr. Secker enjoyed the See of Canterbury, he resided constantly at his archiepiscopal house at Lambeth ; as being not only most commodiously situated for his own studies and employments, but for all those who on various occasions were continually obliged to have recourse to him. These reasons weighed with him so much, that no consideration, not even that of health itself, could ever prevail upon him to quit that place for any length of time. A few months before his death indeed, the dreadful pains he felt had compelled him to think of trying the Bath waters ; but that design was stopt by the fatal accident which put an end to his life.

His grace had been for many years subject to the gout, which in the latter part of his life returned with more frequency and violence, and did not go off in a regular manner, but left the parts affected for a long time very weak, and was succeeded by pains in different parts of the body. About a year and a half before he died, after a fit of the gout, he was attacked with a pain in the arm near the shoulder, which having continued about a twelvemonth, a similar pain seized the upper and outer part of the opposite thigh, and the arm soon became easier. This was much more grievous than the former, as it quickly dis-

abled him from walking, and kept him in almost continual torment, except when he was in a reclined position. During this time he had two or three fits of the gout; but neither the gout nor medicines alleviated these pains, which, with the want of exercise, brought him into a general bad habit of body.

On Saturday the 30th of July, 1768, he was seized, as he sat at dinner, with a sickness at his stomach. He recovered himself before night, but the next evening, whilst his physicians were attending, and his servants raising him on his couch, he suddenly cried out that his thigh-bone was broken. The shock was so violent, that the servants perceived the couch to shake under him, and the pain so acute and unexpected, that it overcame the firmness he so remarkably possessed. He lay for some time in great agonies, but when the surgeons arrived, and discovered with certainty that the bone was broken, he was perfectly resigned, and never afterwards asked a question about the event. A fever soon ensued. On Tuesday he became lethargic, and continued so till about five o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, when he expired with great calmness, in the 75th year of his age.

On examination, the thigh-bone was found to be carious about four inches in length, and at nearly the same distance from its head. The disease took its rise from the internal part of the bone, and had so entirely destroyed its substance, that nothing remained at the part where it was broken but a portion of its outward integument. And even this had many perforations, one of which was large enough to admit two fingers, and was filled with a fungous substance arising from within the bone. There was no appearance of matter about the caries, and the surrounding parts were in a sound state. It was apparent, that the torture which

his grace underwent during the gradual corrosion of this bone, must have been inexpressibly great. Out of tenderness to his family he seldom made any complaints to them, but to his physicians he frequently declared his pains were so excruciating, that unless some relief could be procured, he thought it would be impossible for human nature to support them long. Yet he bore them for upwards of six months with astonishing patience and fortitude ; sat up generally the greater part of the day, admitted his particular friends to see him, mixed with his family at the usual hours, sometimes with his usual chearfulness ; and, except some very slight defects of memory, retained all his faculties and senses in their full vigour till within a few days of his death.

He was buried, pursuant to his own directions, in a covered passage, leading from a private door of the palace to the north door of Lambeth Church ; and he forbade any monument or epitaph to be placed over him.

By his Will he appointed the reverend Dr. Daniel Burton, Canon of Christ-church, and Mrs. Catharine Talbot above-mentioned, his executors ; and left thirteen thousand pounds in the three per cent. annuities, to Dr. Porteus and Dr. Stinton, his chaplains, in trust ; to pay the interest thereof to Mrs. Talbot and her daughter, during their joint lives, or the life of the survivor ; and after the decease of both those ladies, then eleven thousand of the said thirteen thousand are to be transferred to the following charitable purposes ; viz :

To the Society for the Propagation of the	£.	s.	d.
Gospel in foreign parts, for the general			
uses of the Society	-	-	-
	1,000	0	0

	£.	s.	d.
To the same Society, towards the establishment of a Bishop or Bishops in the King's dominions in America - - -	1,000	0	0
To the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge - - - - -	500	0	0
To the Irish Protestant Working Schools	500	0	0
To the Corporation for relieving the Widows and Children of the poor Clergy - - - - -	500	0	0
To the Society of the Stewards of the said Charity - - - - -	200	0	0
To Bromley College in Kent - - - -	500	0	0
To the Hospitals of the Archbishop of Canterbury, at Croydon, St. John at Canterbury, and St. Nicholas Harbledown, £. 500 each - - - - -	1,500	0	0
To St. George's and the London Hospitals, and the Lying-in Hospital in Brownlow-street, £. 500 each - - -	1,500	0	0
To the Asylum in the Parish of Lambeth	400	0	0
To the Magdalen Hospital, the Lock Hospital, the Small-Pox and Inoculation Hospital, to each of which his Grace was a Subscriber, £. 300 each -	900	0	0
To the Incurables at St. Luke's Hospital	500	0	0
Towards repairing or rebuilding the Houses belonging to poor Livings in the Diocese of Canterbury - - - -	2,000	0	0
	£. 11,000 0 0		

Besides these benefactions, he left £. 1,000 to be distributed amongst his servants ; £. 200 to such indigent persons as he had assisted in his life-time ; £. 5,000 to the two daughters of his nephew Mr

Frost; £. 500 to Mrs. Secker, widow of his nephew Dr. George Secker; and £. 200 to Dr. Daniel Burton. After the payment of these and some other smaller legacies, he left his real, and the residue of his personal, estate to his nephew Mr. Thomas Frost, of Nottingham.

Out of his private library, he left to the archiepiscopal one at Lambeth all such books as were not there before, which comprehended much the largest and most valuable part of his own collection; and a great number of very learned MSS. written by himself on various subjects, he bequeathed to the Manuscript Library in the same palace. His Lectures on the Catechism, his Manuscript Sermons, &c. he left to be revised and published by his two Chaplains, Dr. Stinton and Dr. Porteus. His Options he gave to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London, and the Bishop of Winchester, for the time being, in trust; to be disposed of by them (as they became vacant) to such persons as they shall in their consciences think it would have been most reasonable and proper for him to have given them, had he been living.

Such were the last bequests of Archbishop Secker; of which it is enough to say, that they kept up the noble uniformity of his character to the end, and formed a very proper conclusion to the life of a truly great and good man.

His grace was in his person tall and comely; in the early part of life slender, and rather consumptive, but as he advanced in years, his constitution gained strength, and his size increased, yet never to a degree of corpulency that was disproportionate or troublesome.

The dignity of his form corresponded well with the greatness of his mind, and inspired at all times respect,

and awe, but peculiarly so when he was engaged in any of the more solemn functions of religion ; into which he entered with such devout earnestness and warmth, with so just a consciousness of the place he was in, and the business he was about, as seemed to raise him above himself, and added new life and spirit to the natural gracefulness of his appearance.

His countenance was open, ingenuous, and expressive of every thing right. It varied easily with his spirits and his feelings ; so as to be a faithful interpreter of his mind, which was incapable of the least dissimulation. It could speak dejection, and on occasion, anger, very strongly. But when it meant to shew pleasure or approbation, it softened into the most gracious smile, and diffused over all his features the most benevolent and reviving complacency that can be imagined.

His intellectual abilities were of a much higher class than they who never had any opportunities of conversing intimately with him, and who form their opinion of his talents from the general plainness of his language only, will perhaps be willing to allow. He had a quick apprehension, a clear discernment, a sound judgment, a retentive memory. He possessed that native good sense, which is the grand master-key to every art and science, and makes a man skilful in things he has never learnt, as soon as ever it becomes useful or necessary for him to know them. He composed with great ease and readiness ; and in the early part of his life, the letters which he wrote to some of his most intimate friends, were full of imagination, vivacity, and elegance. But when he became a parish-priest, he found the graces of style inconsistent with the purposes of pastoral instruction ; and willingly sacrificed the reputation he might easily have acquired

as a fine writer, to the less showy qualifications of a useful one. From that time he made it his principal study to set every thing he undertook to treat upon in the clearest point of view; to bring his thoughts and his arguments as close together, and to express them in as few and as intelligible words as possible; admitting none but what conveyed some new idea, or were necessary to throw new light on the subject; and never wasting his own time or that of others, by stepping out of his way for needless embellishments. But though in general he thus confined himself to the severe laws of didactic composition, (in which indeed consisted his chief excellence) yet he could be, where the occasion called for it, pathetic, animated, nervous; could rise into that true sublime, which consists not in pomp of diction but grandeur of sentiment, expressed with simplicity and strength; of which his sermons afford several admirable specimens.

It seldom happens, that men of a studious turn acquire any great degree of reputation for their knowledge of business. That love of solitude and contemplation which generally attends true genius, and is necessary for any considerable exertion of it, gives at the same time a certain indolence and softness to the mind, which equally indisposes and unfits it for taking a part in the busy scenes of life. But Dr. Secker's talents were formed no less for action than speculation; nor was he more embarrassed with difficulties in the most intricate affairs, than in the deepest studies. In all the several stations that he passed through, he let nothing suffer for want of attention and care. Wherever his advice and assistance were called for, he never failed to be present, was scrupulously punctual to his appointments, shewed himself a perfect master of the business that came before him, and went through it

with calmness and dispatch. And it was very observable, that though in all important transactions, no one had greater ideas, or proceeded on more enlarged and liberal principles ; yet where it was necessary, he could take notice of the smallest and seemingly most trifling circumstances, and enter into the minutest details with a penetration and exactness, which are seldom seen even in those who are most practised in worldly concerns.

His learning was very extensive, and on those points, which he studied with any degree of attention, profound. He was well acquainted with the Greek and Latin languages ; had in the younger part of his life read with taste the best authors in each ; and of the latter more especially had imbibed so strong a tincture, that when he was near seventy, after a disuse of above forty years, he composed the Latin speech printed at the end of his Charges : the style of which is nervous, manly, and correct.

He possessed a large share of critical penetration, and scarce ever read any book of note without making remarks upon it. Some of these still remain amongst his manuscripts. Some he communicated at different times to the editors or translators of several classic authors. But his chief labours of this kind were bestowed on the holy Scriptures, for which he came well prepared by his knowledge of the original languages in which they were written. In Hebrew literature more especially, his skill was so well known and acknowledged, that few works of eminence in that branch of learning were published, without being first submitted to his examination, and receiving considerable improvement from his corrections. He was the first promoter, and always a liberal encourager, of that very useful work, “ The Collation of the Hebrew

Manuscripts of the Old Testament," undertaken by Dr. Kennicott, and now brought to a conclusion. The greatest part of his leisure hours was employed in studying the original text of the sacred writings : in comparing it with all the antient versions ; in collecting together the remarks made upon it by the most ingenious and learned authors, antient and modern, Jewish and Christian ; in applying to the same purpose every thing he accidentally met with in the course of his reading, that had any tendency to explain and illustrate it ; and superadding to the whole, his own observations and conjectures, some of which have been since confirmed by the best manuscripts. The result of these labours appears in some degree, in the short and masterly explications of Scripture, interspersed occasionally in his Lectures and Sermons ; but more particularly in the interleaved Bibles, and the theological dissertations hereafter mentioned.

But his attention was not solely confined to the Scriptures. He had studied carefully some of the best Christian writers of the primitive ages, and without relying implicitly on their judgment, or adopting their errors, knew well how to avail himself of their real excellencies. Of ecclesiastical history he was a great master : had a clear idea of the progress of Christianity from its first promulgation to the present times, of the various revolutions it had passed through, the different grounds on which it had been opposed or vindicated, the steps by which the corruptions of it had been gradually introduced, the arts by which they had been so long maintained, and the providential coincidence of events which afterwards contributed to remove them. He was well acquainted with the various sects, into which the church was antiently, and is at present divided ; he understood the nature and tendency of their

respective tenets, the state of the controversies subsisting amongst them, the respective merits of their best writers, the proper conduct to be observed towards each, and the good uses that might be made of all. And though in his writing he never made a needless ostentation of all this learning, yet, they who examine some of the plainest of them closely and critically, will find them to be the result of deep thought and a comprehensive knowledge of his subject: will find that he expresses himself on almost every point with propriety, precision, and certainty: without any thing crude or injudicious, without any of those rash assertions and hasty conclusions, into which they, who have but a superficial view of things, and know not what ground they stand upon, are perpetually falling.

The best modern publications in most parts of useful learning, but more especially those which immediately related to his own profession, or were in any degree connected with it, he constantly read; was one of the first to give a satisfactory account of them, to commend them if they deserved it; to point out and obviate their errors, if they contained any which he thought material. But there was one part of his literary character extremely amiable, and, in the degree at least almost peculiar to him; and that was, the incredible pains he would take in revising, correcting, and improving the works of others. This he did in numberless instances besides those which have here been mentioned, with equal zeal and judgment; and some of those compositions which now stand deservedly highest in the estimation of the public, and will go down with increasing fame to future ages, owe no inconsiderable share of their merit to his corrections and communications.

The number of valuable writings which he has left behind him is very considerable. Besides the two

volumes of Occasional Sermons, which appeared in his life-time, the Lectures on the Catechism and the Charges published since his death, and the four volumes of Sermons now offered to the public, he has bequeathed to the manuscript library at Lambeth, a great variety of learned and curious pieces, written by himself, to be preserved there under the sole care of the Archbishop, for the time being, and to be inspected by no one without his Grace's express permission.

Amongst these manuscripts, some of the most remarkable are ; an interleaved English Bible in four volumes in folio, with occasional remarks upon the New Testament, very copious ; tending chiefly to clear up difficulties, and to correct and improve the present translation, with a view probably to a new one ; Michael's Hebrew Bible filled with comparisons of the antient versions, emendations, and conjectures on the original text ; two folio volumes of notes upon Daniel ; a great number of critical dissertations on controverted passages of Scripture ; remarks on some modern publications ; and several volumes of miscellanies, written in the former part of his life, containing chiefly extracts from various authors and observations upon them, the objections of sceptical writers to the truth of revelation, with answers to some, and materials or hints for answers to many others.

It may justly seem surprising, that in a life so active, so full of employment and avocation from study,* the Archbishop could find leisure to read so much, and to

* Ille primum habuit in multiplicibus quibus districtus est curis, nulli deesse ; neque quisquam fuit qui literarum studiis majorem operam otiosus posuit, quam ille occupatissimo in loco. In aliis quidem hominibus ingenium excellens, et multiplicem scientiam agnoscimus, in aliis consilium, auctoritatem, probitatem, constantiam ; in quo autem hæc omnia ita abundè convenerint haud facillè inveniemus. *Concio ad Clerum, & oratiuncula, a Gulielmo Markham habitæ, 1769, p. 25.* Sold by T. Payne.

leave behind him so many writings ; some of them learned and critical ; all of them full of good sense and useful knowledge. The fact is, that in him were united two things which very rarely meet together, but, when they do, can produce wonders, strong parts, and unwearied industry. He rose at six the whole year round, and had often spent a busy day, before others began to enjoy it. His whole time was marked out and appropriated in the most regular manner to particular employments, and he never suffered even those broken portions of it, which are seldom much regarded, to be idly thrown away. The strength of his constitution happily kept pace with the activity of his mind, and enabled him to go on incessantly from one business to another with almost unremitted application, till, his spirits being quite exhausted, he was obliged at last to have recourse to rest, which however he always took care to make as short as possible.

Industry like this, continued through a long course of years, could not possibly be the effect of any thing but that which was indeed at the bottom of it, a strong sense of duty. It was not because the Archbishop had less relish for ease, or less dislike to fatigue than other men, that his diligence and perseverance so far exceeded theirs ; but because he thought himself bound to labour for the good of mankind, and that all indolence and self-indulgence, which interfered with this, was in some degree criminal. Whenever therefore he was engaged (as he was almost continually) in serving others, he never reckoned his own time or pains for any thing, nor did it seem so much as once to enter into his thoughts, that he ought to allow himself any amusement. Even the pleasures of polite literature, which were highly grateful to him, he thought himself obliged to relinquish for the peculiar studies of his pro-

fession, and these again for the practical duties of religion, and the daily offices of common life. On this principle he made it a point to be at all times accessible. Even in those early hours, which were more peculiarly dedicated to retirement and study, if any one came to him on the smallest pretence of business, he would instantly break off the most pleasing or most abstruse speculations, receive his visiter with perfect good humour, and sacrifice those precious moments to duty, to civility, to the slightest propriety, which he would on no account have given up to relaxation or repose.

This indeed was only one instance, amongst many others, of that wonderful command he had obtained over his most favourite inclinations, and the facility with which he controlled his strongest passions. His temper was naturally quick and impatient; but by keeping a watchful eye over the movements of his own mind, and prescribing to himself certain excellent rules and precautions to which he inviolably adhered, he so totally subdued this dangerous propensity, that few who knew him had any suspicion of his being subject to it. Sometimes indeed, on very trying occasions, he might be seen ready to kindle on a sudden into some expressions of anger, and as suddenly recollecting and checking himself; keeping down the rising tumult within him, and resuming almost instantaneously his usual mildness and composure.

In him appeared all the efficacy of religious principle, the calmness, the greatness of mind, the fortitude, the chearfulness, which no other principle could inspire, support, and improve through a whole life. That fervent yet rational piety, which glowed in his writings, which animated his devotions, was the genuine effusion of his soul, the supreme guide and director of his actions and designs. It was not, as is sometimes the case, assumed

occasionally, and laid aside when the eye of the world was not upon him; but was the same in private as in public, to those who observed him at a distance, and those who lived and conversed intimately with him, who had opportunities of seeing him at all hours, and under all circumstances, in his retired and serious as well as in his freest and most chearful moments. The honour of God, and the interests of religion, were evidently nearest his heart. He thought of them, he talked of them, he was concerned and anxious for them, he sought out for opportunities of advancing them, he was careful not to say or do any thing that might hurt them in the estimation of mankind. This it was which kept up that uniform decency and propriety so remarkable in his whole deportment, which preserved him from every unbecoming levity of behaviour and conversation, added weight and dignity to his character, and raised him above all the common meannesses of merely secular men.

His soul was generous beyond description. Even when his income was but moderate, and the provision made for his family very slender, he lived hospitably, and gave liberally. As his revenues encreased, his beneficence rose in proportion, insomuch, that after the first expenses of his promotion to the see of Canterbury were over, his charitable donations were considerably more than two thousand pounds a year. On all proper occasions his heart and his hand were so free, that he seemed not to have, as indeed he had not, the least regard for money. The ease and readiness with which he gave away the largest sums, plainly shewed, that long habit had rendered it quite natural and familiar to him, and that he saw nothing wonderful or extraordinary in acts of generosity, which others could not observe without surprise.

They who applied to him on account of any public subscription, in favour of any thing useful or even ornamental to his country, commonly received much more than they expected; and were frequently withheld from repeating their solicitations, through fear, not of being denied, but of trespassing too far on a liberality that seemed to know no bounds. In matters of private charity, the number of indigent persons whom he relieved by occasional benefactions, or supported by annual pensions, was very great. Yet his favors were not lavished away with undistinguishing profusion. He took pains to find out the real merits and distresses of those who asked relief from him, and endeavoured, as far as he was able, to single out the virtuous and religious, as peculiar objects of his bounty. He thought it a material part of true benevolence, to have an eye not only to the removal of misery, but the encouragement of piety and good morals. With this view he was particularly attentive to such charities as were calculated to advance useful knowledge or spiritual improvement: which he made a point of encouraging by his example, not only as being in themselves highly beneficial, but also strangely disregarded sometimes by very worthy, and, in other respects very considerate persons.

In the government of his family there was an air of ease and generosity without any affectation of magnificence or show. His house was hospitable, and his table plentiful, yet plain and simple. He wished to have every thing suitable to his rank, but would consent to nothing beyond it. He thought it right in one of his station and profession to discountenance, as far as he could, all luxurious elegancies. He would therefore never give into several fashionable accommodations, nor admit extraordinary delicacies to his table,

nor even accept them when offered to him. He received his company with politeness and good humour, and entertained them, when he was in health and spirits, with lively and improving conversation. He could make pertinent observations on almost any topic that happened to be started, how remote soever from the natural course of his studies. Men of eminent worth or learning he distinguished by peculiar notice, led the discourse to such subjects as called out their respective excellencies, and shewed that they spoke before one who could judge well of their merits.

Yet it must be owned that he was not always equally affable and obliging. There was sometimes a reserve and coldness in his manner, that threw a damp on conversation, and prevented strangers from being perfectly at their ease before him. This was by some imputed to pride. But in reality it arose from very different causes: sometimes from bodily pain, which he often felt when he did not own it; sometimes from his spirits being wasted or depressed by the fatigues of the morning; sometimes from accidental uneasiness arising in the course of business, which he could not immediately shake off his mind. To this should be added, that the natural loftiness of his figure, and the opinion generally and justly entertained of his learning and strictness of life, were of themselves apt to produce a kind of awe and constraint in his company, when he was far from wishing to inspire it.

It was remarkable that he chose always rather to talk of things than persons; was very sparing in giving his opinion of characters, very candid when he did. Of his own good deeds or great attainments he never spoke, nor loved to hear others speak. Compliments were very irksome to him. They visibly put

him out of humour, and gave him actual pain ; and he would sometimes express his dislike of them in such plain terms, as effectually prevented a repetition of them from the same person.

To his domestics he was a gentle and indulgent master. Many of them he suffered to continue with their families in his house after they were married. None of them were discharged on account of sickness or infirmity, but were assisted with the best advice that could be had at a great yearly expence. Those who had attended him in illness, or served him long and faithfully, he never failed to reward with an unsparing hand. Towards his other dependants, his behaviour was even and friendly. He expected every one about him to do their duty, of which he himself first set them the example ; and, provided they did so with any tolerable care, they were secure of his favour. Of slight faults he took no notice ; of great ones he would express his sense at the time strongly ; but never suffered them to dwell or rankle on his mind, or operate to the future prejudice of those whose general conduct was right. To his relations he was continually doing the best-natured, the handsomest, the most generous things ; assisting them in difficulties, comforting them in affliction, promoting their interests, and improving their circumstances reasonably, not aggrandizing or enriching them invidiously.

The unaltered kindness he shewed to the two ladies that lived with him from the time of his marriage to that of his death, that is, for upwards of two-and-forty years, was a remarkable instance of steady friendship ; and shewed that his soul was no less formed for that rare union of virtuous minds, than for every other generous affection. The younger of those two ladies Mrs. Catherine Talbot, (who, to the finest imagination

and the most elegant accomplishments of her sex added the gentlest manners, and a disposition thoroughly benevolent and devout,) did not long survive the Archbishop. She died on the 9th of January, 1770, in the 49th year of her age.

Thus much it has been judged requisite to lay before the world in relation to Archbishop Secker; not with any view of exalting his character higher than it deserves, which is quite needless; but of making its real value more generally known, and of rescuing it from the misrepresentations of a few misinformed or malevolent men. To some, no doubt, the portrait here drawn of him will appear a very flattering one; but it will be much easier to call than to prove it such. Nothing has been advanced but what is founded on the most authentic evidence, nor has any circumstance been designedly strained beyond the truth. And if his Grace did really live and act in such a manner that the most faithful delineation of his conduct must necessarily have the air of a panegyric, the fault is not in the copy, but in the original.

After this plain representation of facts therefore, it cannot be thought necessary to enter here into a particular examination of the various falshoods, which his Grace's enemies have so industriously circulated in order to fix, if possible, some stain upon his reputation. It would be very unreasonable to expect that he of all others, so high in rank and so active in the discharge of his duty, should amidst the present rage of defamation, escape without his full share of censure; and it would be very weak to apprehend the least ill consequences from it. There is so little doubt from what quarter those invectives come, and to what causes they are owing, that they do not appear to have made the slightest impression on any unprejudiced mind,

and, for want of ground to support them, are sinking hourly into oblivion. If a life spent like Archbishop Secker's, and a spirit such as breathes through every page of his writings, are not a sufficient confutation of all such idle calumnies, it is in vain to think that any thing else can be so. All that his friends have to do, is to wait a little while with patience and temper. Time never fails to do ample justice to such characters as his; which if left to themselves, will always rise by their own force above the utmost efforts made to depress them, and acquire fresh lustre every day in the eyes of all considerate and dispassionate men.

S E R M O N I.

1 THESS. v. 21, 22.

PROVE ALL THINGS : HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD :
ABSTAIN FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL.

BY the extensive word, *all*, the Apostle in this place evidently means no more, than *all things* which may be right or wrong in point of conscience. And by *proving them* he means, not that we should try them both by experience, which would be an absurd and pernicious direction : but that we should examine them by our faculty of judgment, which is a wise and useful exhortation. Accordingly Christianity recommends itself to us at first sight by this peculiar presumption of its being the true religion, that it makes application to men as reasonable creatures, and claims our assent on account of the proofs, which it offers. By these alone it prevailed originally : on these it still relies ; and requires faith for the principle of our obedience, only because it produces evidence for the ground of our faith. Now such an institution surely is intitled to receive the fair treatment which it gives, when it asks of mankind no more than this ; that they should first consider well the several obligations they are under ; then adhere to whatever they find to be enjoined them, and lastly, avoid whatever they conceive to be forbidden : which momentous duties I shall endeavour to explain and enforce in three discourses on the text.

That Beings, capable of thought, are obliged to think, is very obvious: that they should think with the greatest care on subjects of the greatest importance, is equally so: and the question, what obligations we are under, is plainly of the utmost importance. For our behaviour, and consequently our happiness, depends on the determination of it. Therefore we are just as much bound to conduct our understandings well, as our tempers or outward actions. And the opportunities given us of shewing, either diligence in procuring information, and fairness in judging upon it, or the contrary, are trials, which God hath appointed, of every one's moral character; and perhaps the chief trials, which some have to go through. Every instance, greater or less, of wilfully disregarding truth, instead of seeking and embracing it, argues a proportionable depravity of heart; whether the dislike be manifested in a studious opposition to it, or an indolent scorn of it.

There are some who openly profess an utter contempt of all inquiry; despise such as are solicitous either about belief or practice, and even affect a thoughtlessness, which they find to be grown fashionable. Now really, if this be an accomplishment, it is one, that whoever will may easily be master of. But surely men ought to think seriously once for all, before they resolve for the rest of their days to think no more. There are strong appearances, that many things of great consequence are incumbent on us. No one can be sure, that these appearances are fallacious, till he hath examined into them. Many, who have, are fully persuaded of their truth. And if there be such things in the world as folly and guilt, it can never be either wise or innocent to disdain giving ourselves any trouble about the matter, and take it absolutely for granted,

that we may live as we will: a decision of such a nature, that were it made on seemingly ever so good grounds, it would be very fit to review them well from time to time, for fear of a mistake that must be fatal.

And if a general neglect of considering our conduct be criminal, a neglect of considering any part of it must, in its degree, be criminal also. Many have weighed carefully, and observe conscientiously, some duties of life; but will not reflect a moment, whether it be allowable for them to behave, in other points, as they do. And yet, if any moral obligation deserves regard, every such obligation deserves it equally. And when the question comes to be, what is indeed such, and what not, impartial reason, well directed, must be judge; not inclination or fancy: for if these can make things lawful, nothing will be unlawful. And therefore, instead of ever following such guides implicitly, we should always have the greater suspicion that we are going wrong, the more vehemently they press us to go forward.

Some again have searched, and obtained satisfaction, they say, concerning every article of Morals; but will not concern themselves about Religion. Yet surely the inquiry, whether there be a wise and just ruler of this universe or not; and if there be, what homage he expects from us; and what we have to hope or fear from him, according as we pay it, or refuse it; is as material a one, as ever was made. And on what pretence any one can doubt whether it be worth making, and reverently too, it is impossible to say.

Another sort declare, that they have a settled conviction of natural religion, (would God they would ask their hearts, what feelings of it they cultivate, what marks of it they shew,) but treat Revelation at the same time, as totally unworthy of being considered.

Yet that our heavenly Father can give us very useful information both of what we did not know before, and of what we could not know else, is at least as credible, as it is certain that we can give such one to another. And that he may with justice give some men greater advantages than others by supernatural discoveries, is no less clear, than that he may give them such advantages by their natural abilities and circumstances. If then God may do this for us, it is a most interesting question, whether he hath or not; and an indispensable precept, which the words, immediately preceding the text, express when joined with it. *Despise not prophecies: prove all things.*

But there is yet a different set of persons, who confess, that both our attention, and our assent, are due to Christianity in general, but who are against discussing any of its doctrines in particular. Provided men know but enough of it, to keep them well-behaved and quiet, nothing further, they conceive, is needful: whatever sentiments about speculative points happen to prevail, should be supported, and no disputes allowed to break in upon the peace of the world. Now it is very true, that society should not be disturbed by contentions about opinions, as it hath often been most dreadfully: nor men be perplexed about questions of mere curiosity, instead of learning better things; nor frightened, or estranged from each other by laying stress on points of mere nicety. And the New Testament strongly forbids all these things. But still, if the Christian religion be from Heaven, it cannot be a matter of indifference, what its real doctrines are: nor can its author have given us the liberty of professing others in their stead. Some of them may seem, and perhaps may be, though that doth not follow, of small consequence to the purposes of common life: but if

they convey to us just notions of God, and of those relations of ours to him, which are never the less real for not being discoverable by reason ; if they instruct us in the duties, which those relations require, and form us to that state of mind, which he knows to be requisite for enjoying the happiness of another world, be their connexion with this world ever so little, surely they are important enough. Some of them also have doubts and difficulties attending them ; as even the doctrines of natural religion, and the duties of morality have : but these were intended to furnish us with opportunities of shewing uprightness in judging where we are qualified to judge ; and humility in submitting our shallow imaginations to unfathomable wisdom, where we are not : the exercise of which virtues here will fit us for a plentiful reward hereafter. And would men but once prevail on themselves to express their thoughts on controverted subjects with decency and candour : society, instead of suffering by debates, would receive much benefit. Christianity would be better understood ; and therefore more justly esteemed, and more discreetly practised : it would be built on firmer foundations, and therefore be securer against all assaults.

There still remains a large number of Christians, I mean the advocates of the church of Rome, who are indeed by no means indifferent what doctrines are held, but vehemently oppose entering into any disquisitions about them ; and would have us, instead of that, first look out for an infallible guide, and then follow him blindfold. But they have never been able to shew, that such infallibility exists among men ; or even to agree with each other determinately, in whom they should place it. And the Scripture, far from directing us to examine this one claim, and after that never to

examine more, directs us in many places, but particularly in the text, by as plain words as can be written, to *prove*, that is, examine, *all things*. But were this otherwise, their pretension will require no long examination: for it is in vain to argue that such or such men cannot mistake, when it notoriously appears in fact, that they have mistaken.

Every article therefore both of morals and religion may and ought to be tried, in such manner as can be reasonably expected from the parts, attainments and circumstances of each person: and concerning this, we should both judge modestly for ourselves, and consult others with deference. For attempting too much will be more likely to mislead, than improve us.

But then the more general and important this duty of inquiry is, the more care must be taken to perform it aright. For many pique themselves on a most unbounded zeal for freedom of thought, and a thorough search into things, who yet by no means deserve the character which they assume.

Some of them fancy they have thought very freely upon religion. Now this is, in one sense, treating it freely indeed, but no proof of thinking upon it at all. For mere disbelieving is no more an evidence of having examined, than mere believing is. However, at least, they say, they have thrown off the prejudices, in which they were bred up: and throwing off prejudices must be right. But then they are many of them for extirpating, under that odious name, original natural dispositions in the heart of man. For instance: the propensity, that we all experience to revere an invisible power; the esteem that we all feel of justice and truth, of mercy and goodness, of honour and decency; are as real constituents of our inward frame, as any passion or appetite, that belongs to it. Yet these

principles, which direct us to every thing that is good, they would persuade us to root out as prejudices; while they plead earnestly for the inclinations, that continually prompt us to vice, as dictates of nature. And a part of our nature undoubtedly they are: but a part lamentably disordered; and which, in its best estate, the other and higher was evidently designed to govern and restrain. At least, to set out with taking the contrary for granted; and condemn things at once, as groundless prepossessions, which have so respectable an appearance of being the primitive guides of life, is by no means inquiring freely.

Another false notion concerning prejudices, though at first sight a plausible one, is, that we ought to divest ourselves of all desire to find religion true, before we go about to judge of it. Now it is impossible, that a person of a worthy mind should do so. He may indeed, and will take care, not to be misled by his desire. But he neither can, nor ought to be indifferent concerning a point, on which his own eternal happiness, and that of every good man upon earth, depends. Nor is this the only case, far from it, in which we are bound to wish on one side, and yet determine fairly between both. In judicial proceedings, a benevolent magistrate will constantly wish, that whoever is accused before him may prove innocent: notwithstanding which, he will try his cause with the most upright impartiality.

But if this degree of prepossession in favour of religion be right, how exceedingly wrong must prepossession against it be! What are we to think of those, and what have they cause to think of themselves, who can take pleasure in that comfortless and horrid view of things, which infidelity gives; and triumph in believing, that *there is no Reward for the Righteous*, no

*God that judgeth the earth !** One would hope they do not see distinctly, and yet it is exceedingly visible, what malevolence to human kind rejoicing in a thought of this nature implies.

Or if they do not wish against religion in general, yet, if they wish against the Christian religion, they are enemies to a doctrine, which confirms very powerfully all the great truths that reason teaches; which clears up, intirely to our advantage, many tormenting doubts, that reason leaves us involved in; and which, however it may have been perverted, (as every good thing in the world hath) undeniably is in its nature an institution the most completely fitted to make men happy in themselves and one another, in the present state and the future, that ever was. Did we then see those, who profess themselves unsatisfied about its evidence, afraid it was insufficient; grieved that the proofs appeared no stronger, and the objections so considerable; this would shew a mind, which the Scripture calls *noble* †, *not far from the Kingdom of God* ‡. And at times, they most of them affect to seem thus disposed; and will assure such as press them upon the subject, that, of all things, they wish they could but be so happy as to believe. But why then were they in such haste to disbelieve, and most of them to act viciously upon their disbelief? Why would they not hear and consider first? Why will they not now reconsider the subject, and acquaint themselves with the defences of our Faith, as well as the attacks made upon it? Why do they delight in making converts of all that they can? Why are they so prone to ridicule, or calumniate those, whom they cannot? Such symptoms look very suspicious; and should induce those, who are conscious of them, to put

* Psalm lviii. 10.

† Acts xvii. 2.

‡ Mark xii. 34.

the question home to themselves, whether this great good will to religion be really the temper, with which they have ever enquired into it, or do now inwardly think of it; or whether indeed their professions are only a specious manner of talking, occasionally taken up to serve a turn. If the latter be the case, they must, in order to be fair doubters, guard against another sort of prejudices, than they imagined.

Some prejudices, either right or wrong, will take hold of us very soon. And therefore it is fit, that as far as we can, we should examine the foundation of our early opinions: but with equity, with candour, not with a resolution beforehand to find fault: for as they are never the truer for our being educated in them, they are never the falser either. But indeed the education of many hath placed them so very little in the way, either of receiving prejudices, or hearing arguments in favour of religion; that they have need to begin with throwing off prejudices to its disadvantage; and should suspect that much more may be said for it, than the little, which hath come to their knowledge. It is probable, that they might have some impressions of piety, such as they were, made upon them by the superintendants of their childhood; and it is possible, that something may have been added since to these impressions, by their attendance, if haply they have been suffered to attend, on public instruction. But as soon as they begin to see a little more of the world, and observe what passes around them, what a number of things will they meet with, likely to give them a much stronger bias towards infidelity, than the forms of a common education have given them towards faith! They will find but too many declared unbelievers, and even teachers of unbelief: very many, who, if they do not expressly deny Christianity, speak and act as if

they despised it ; and few, in comparison, that vouchsafe it a serious and uniform regard. The abuses of religion they will hear most invidiously magnified ; the benefits of it most artfully and maliciously depreciated ; the public worship of God condemned, as idle formality ; the private, as enthusiastic folly ; the ministers of his word represented as objects only of contempt or abhorrence : and the consequence hath been, that, by thinking of us in a manner, which, with all our faults, God forbid we should deserve, multitudes are come to think of the Gospel, that we preach, in a manner, which they certainly ought not, did we deserve ever so ill. When prejudices from without like these, are added to the vehement ones within, which vanity forms against every thing that would humble it, and passions and appetites against every thing that would restrain them ; it is easy to perceive, where the danger of partiality lies ; and what prepossessions the company they have kept, the books they have read, the lives they have led, make necessary to be banished by too many, if they would become fair enquirers.

Let it therefore be examined, on what foundation the notions, that we have learned, of religion and virtue stand. But let it be examined also, on what foundation the prevailing notions, which contradict religion and virtue stand. For to lay it down as a maxim, that these are well grounded, and discard the former merely on that presumption, is monstrously unreasonable. We own it to be highly proper, that men should ask themselves, why they believe : but it is equally proper for them to ask, why they disbelieve. Undoubtedly they should not be bigots and zealots : but then they should not be so against religion, any more than for it. Implicit faith is wrong : but implicit infidelity is yet more so. And whatever fault may be

found with the trust, which it is said the godly repose in their spiritual guides; it is full as possible, and perhaps in proportion full as frequent, for the ungodly to follow one another on to their lives end, with their eyes close shut, each in the most servile reliance on what his leader tells him; only with the ridiculous addition of admiring most immoderately, all the way, their own wonderful freedom of thought.

By such considerations as these men should prepare their minds for beginning to inquire. And when they do begin, it is an important rule, not to be too hasty in drawing conclusions, especially bold ones. Viewing things on every side, observing how far consequences reach, and proceeding to collect and hear evidence, till reason saith there needs no more, is grievous labour to indolence and impatience, and by no means answers the ends of conceit and affectation. A shorter way therefore is commonly taken. Some objection of minute philosophy strikes their thoughts unexpectedly or comes recommended to them as highly fashionable: and whether a solid answer can be given to it, they never ask. Some argument, urged in favour of religion, proves or seems to be a weak one: and, without more ado, they infer, that the rest are no stronger. Some things, which have been generally received, they find or apprehend are false or doubtful; and therefore nothing, they imagine, is certain. Some text of Scripture, possibly transcribed or translated amiss, is hard to defend, or to reconcile with some other; and therefore they slight the whole. Some doctrine, which revelation is said to teach, appears hard to understand or admit, or is capable of a ludicrous turn: and therefore immediately they reject, not only that, but others not in the least connected with it; throw aside at once the intire system; and it may be, plunge headlong

into vice. Yet, all the while, Revelation perhaps doth not teach this doctrine, and they are offended solely at a phantom of their own dressing up; or perhaps teaches it with great reason, for any thing which they can ever prove to the contrary. For in a nature so unsearchable as that of God, and a scheme so vast as that of his universal government, there must be many things, which creatures of our limited faculties cannot approach towards comprehending; and, merely for want of comprehending, may fancy to be full of incredibilities, which could we but know more, or would we but remember that we know so little, would instantly vanish. In matters therefore, which we understand so very imperfectly, to set up human imagination against divine authority; to rely on crude notions, that things are impossible, which proper testimony shews to be true in fact; or that God cannot be, or do, what by his own declarations, he is, and hath done, betrays a disposition widely distant from the modesty which becomes us.

Besides, were the difficulties which attend the system of religion, more considerable than they are; yet we should take notice, that difficulties attend the contrary system also; and consider, since one must be true, which is most likely to be so. If there be objections against a creation and a providence; are there not greater against supposing, that the world could have existed without being created, or continue all this time without a providence? If there be somewhat scarce conceivable in the doctrine of a future life and judgment: yet upon the whole, which of the two is most probable, that a wise and good God will finally recompense men according to their works, or that he will not? If there be things in the Gospel-Revelation, for which it is hard to account, is it so hard to account for

any thing upon earth, as how it should come to have such astonishing proofs, internal and external, of being true, if it be really false? They who think the creed of a Christian so strange and mysterious, let them think a while, what the creed of an infidel must be, if he would only lay aside his general pretences of imposture and enthusiasm and credulity and bigotry, which thrown out at random will discredit all evidence of history alike; and answer in particular, how, on his own hypothesis, he accounts for all the several notorious facts, on which our religion is built. I am persuaded, there hath never appeared yet amongst men so incomprehensible a collection of tenets, as this would produce. Men may indeed be too easy of belief: but it is just as great a weakness to be too full of suspicion. Reverence for antiquity may impose upon us: but fondness for novelty may do the same thing. Undoubtedly we should be on the watch against pious frauds: but against impious ones too. For whatever dishonesty the advocates of religion have been either justly or unjustly charged with, the opposers of it have given full proof, at least of their inclination not to come short of them. Whoever therefore would proceed in the right path, must be attentive to the dangers on each side.

Perhaps this may seem to require more pains than most persons are capable of. But of an upright disposition every one is capable: and with this, common abilities and leisure will suffice to judge concerning the necessary points of faith and practice. Few indeed, or none, can judge of any thing without relying in some measure on the knowledge and veracity of others. And what must we think of human nature, or what will become of human society, if we can take nothing on each other's word? We should hearken to no one indeed, who asserts plain absurdities. And we should

always judge for ourselves as far as we can. But we should not affect to do it farther. Where we visibly want, either parts or learning or time for it, as we frequently do in worldly affairs of great moment, no less than in religion, we are both allowed and obliged to depend on others. Only we must observe these two directions: that we first pay a due respect to that legal authority, under which Providence hath placed us: and, then chuse, according to the best of our understandings, the worthiest and wisest and most considerate persons to be our conductors. For as we should never hastily run after uncommissioned guides, so above all things we should beware of artful or self-sufficient, of rash and impetuous ones: which last, however it happens, men are peculiarly apt to follow, though almost sure of being led by them, not only wrong, but great lengths in what is wrong: whereas there are no plainer rules of behaviour than these, that in proportion as we are in the dark, we should go on gently: and wherever there may be hazard, keep on the safer side.

He that will conduct himself thus, may soon make large advances in religious knowledge: and wherever he stops, needs not be uneasy. Though the arguments, which he hath for his faith, may not be the strongest: yet a *tree* but weakly rooted, often *brings forth good fruit*; and if it doth, will never *be hewn down, and cast into the fire*. * Though he may be ignorant of many things, and doubt or even err concerning many others, yet they may be of small importance: or, though of great, yet having used a competent care to inform himself, he will obtain pardon. We cannot indeed say with exactness, how much of their time and pains men are bound to spend upon examination, any more than how much of their wealth in works of charity:

* Matth. iii. 10. vii. 19.

and the less, as both duties vary according to the circumstances of every individual. But let each consult his conscience, with a serious desire of being told the truth, whether it hath been, and is now, his habitual endeavour to determine and to act as rightly as he can : and, if the answer be clearly in his favour, when he is neither disposed to frighten nor flatter himself, let him trust in God, *and be at peace**. For *like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.*†

Not that, after all, it is indifferent, whether we fall into errors concerning religion, or escape them. For both mistakes and bare ignorance, where they are accompanied with little or no guilt, may often be followed by great disadvantages. Wrong notions in the understanding may produce wrong movements in the heart ; which, even when they will not bring down upon us future punishment, may unfit us for certain degrees of future reward. And, on the contrary, a larger portion of piety and virtue, and therefore of heavenly felicity, may prove to be the natural consequence of a more extensive acquaintance with gospel truths. So that, in the reason of things, as well as the sure foundation of divine promises, good Christians are intitled to expect those distinguished glories in a better world, for which others, though in proportion to their talents, truly good, may not be qualified.

But still it is allowable to hope, and to rejoice in hoping, that a Being unspeakably gracious will confer some measure of happiness hereafter on all the sons of men, who have not made themselves incapable of it ; and that neither involuntary nor excusable misapprehensions will exclude any from it. If indeed, under colour of reasoning freely, men will argue fallaciously,

* Job xxii. 21.

† Psal. ciii. 13.

conclude precipitately, and behave presumptuously; talk and do what they please without modesty or fear; and set themselves up, on this merit, for the only assertors of liberty, when in truth they are willing slaves to a wicked mind; these, of all men, *have no cloke for their sin**. But the virtuous and humble inquirer, who studies to conduct his understanding with impartial care first, and his life with inoffensive sincerity afterwards, yet, conscious of his many failings, begs for pardon and strength to be given him in such manner as his Maker sees fit, may surely comfort himself with pleasing expectations of acceptance after death. *As many, therefore, as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God*†.

* John xv. 22.

† Gal. vi. 16.

S E R M O N II.

1 THESS. v. 21, 22.

PROVE ALL THINGS : HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD :
ABSTAIN FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL.

THE first duty of reasonable creatures, with respect to religion, is, informing themselves, as fully as their natural abilities, their improvements in knowledge, and their condition of life permit, concerning its truth, and the doctrines it teaches. Multitudes are unable to proceed far in this inquiry : of the rest, some totally neglect it, some carry it on with less care and integrity, or fewer advantages, than others. And hence it comes to pass, that different persons think upon the subject in very different manners : and even the same person, in progress of time, very differently from himself. But then every state of mind, that men can be in, relative to these matters, hath its proper obligations belonging to it : and, for want of paying due regard to them, they whose opinions are right may be very bad in their practice ; and they whose opinions are wrong, much worse, than even their own notions, by any just consequence, allow them to be. Not uncommonly indeed the goodness of men's nature prevails, through God's mercy, in some points, over the ill tendency of their principles ; and makes them better, than they profess themselves. But much oftener they run into such behaviour, as must be unwarrantable, according to the very doctrines, which

they have embraced. And therefore every one should consider well, to what sort of conduct these really direct him, and from what they restrain him. Men may think, they could not help being of the opinions they are: but if they take still greater liberties, than their opinions lead them to; instead of suspecting, that possibly they may lead them too far: this they must know to be their own fault; and, while they indulge it, one doth not see, what they will stop at: whereas keeping carefully within the bounds, which their judgment sets them, will be the best excuse they can have, in their present way of thinking; and the likeliest means of discerning and amending the errors of it.

Having therefore laid before you, in the first place, the duty of *proving all things*, and the general disposition of mind, with which it should be done: I proceed now to the consequent duty, of *holding fast that which is good*, and *abstaining from all appearance of evil*. And as the appearances of good and evil must vary, according to the notions, which are espoused about them; it will be useful to consider those of unbelievers, as well as believers: for which purpose, there must be some extraordinary suppositions made: but I hope the truly pious will neither think them shocking, nor useless; being introduced only for the sake of suggesting to them such things, as though they want not for themselves, or for others like them, they may perhaps employ to good effect for convincing or silencing infidels and libertines, when occasion requires: and there hath seldom been more occasion, than at present.

To begin then with imagining a worse case, than perhaps is possible. Were any one persuaded, not only that all religion is groundless, but that virtue and

vice, right and wrong, are mere words without meaning: yet even such a one, if he did not think wisdom and folly, pleasure and pain, empty sounds too; would have some rule of conduct, so far as it reached. Still it would be matter of serious consideration, what behaviour promises the most happiness, upon the whole, to such beings, placed in such a world, as we are. And our present interest here, had we no other guide, far from permitting us to do every mad thing, that passion, appetites or fancies, prompt us to, would direct us, in a great measure, to a course of honesty, friendliness and sobriety. For not only life and health, and safety and quiet; of which no other method can possibly give us, in general, near so good a prospect; are of much too high importance, to be hazarded wantonly: but reputation also is a matter of no small value; and peace within of greater still. Now suppose there were no reason in the least for any one to feel satisfaction in doing good-natured and just things, or uneasiness from the reflection of having done cruel and base ones; yet, as in fact, almost, if not absolutely, all persons do feel both; to aim at the former, and avoid the latter, is, with regard to principle, a dictate of common prudence.

But farther, whatever some may think of moral obligation themselves, they have many reasons to desire, that the world about them should think highly of it. For though discretion, abstracted from sense of duty, might reasonably, in most cases, restrain those, with whom we are concerned, from using us ill; yet it will restrain them but in few instances; and then very imperfectly. So that whoever is considerate, will be extremely unwilling to weaken the bonds of human society: which he will find, at best, are by no means too strong. And therefore, should he think it

his own interest to be wicked ; yet, if he be wise, he will never attempt to make one single person like him, besides those whom he absolutely needs for associates : and even of such he will beware : for he hath *taught them an evil lesson against himself**. But spreading his opinions farther, he will look on as the silliest of vanities : and be earnestly desirous, that others should act upon principle, whatever he doth himself : that his friends should be faithful and affectionate, his servants honest and careful, his children dutiful and regular. And they, who, in the fancied superiority of their knowledge, teach those about them, or those with whom they converse, to be profligate ; by expressing, either designedly or carelessly, a contempt of virtue ; well deserve the return, they often meet with, for such instructions.

Nay indeed every prudent man, be his private way of thinking ever so bad, will be solicitous to preserve in the world, not only morals ; but, for the sake of morals, what is the main support of them, religion too : and that religion, which is the likeliest to support them. Though he conceive it to be false, he will respect it as beneficial. Were he to imagine this or that part of it hurtful ; he would still moderate his zeal against them, so as not to destroy the influence of the rest. For if believing some things may do harm in the world, believing others may do good. And if any thing whatever can do much good, and no harm : it is the persuasion, that we live continually under the eye of an infinitely powerful and wise, just and good Ruler ; who hath sent us a person of inconceivable dignity, on purpose to give us the fullest assurance of his rewarding all, who shall repent and amend, and punishing all who continue in wickedness, both here

* Eccles ix. 1.

and to eternity. To do or say what may weaken the impressions of such a doctrine, must, on all suppositions, be the grossest folly. And yet some, who have the highest opinion of their own understandings, are perpetually guilty of it: and seem not to discern, how impossible it is, that the world should ever be influenced, to any good purpose, by what the daily conversation and example of those, who are likely to be reckoned the more knowing part of the world, encourage the rest to despise.

But I dwell too long on the supposition that men can be absolutely persuaded, that religion and virtue are nothing. For though many have wished, and some said it, when the wickedness of their lives hath driven them to that refuge: and though others may have been led, by love of singularity, or indignation against reigning superstitions, to advance the same notion: yet neither their numbers, nor their abilities, have been comparatively at all considerable: and besides, few of them appear to have thoroughly convinced themselves, at least for any time, of what they affirmed: nor is there pretence of ground for such conviction to rest on. Doubts indeed may be raised, such as they are. And therefore let us consider, in the second place, the obligations of those, who are doubtful about these matters. Now uncertainty, as it implies an apprehension, that they may not be true; implies also an apprehension, that they may. And the lowest degree of likelihood, the very possibility, that God is, and that virtue is his law, should in all reason have a powerful influence on the minds and conduct of men. Perhaps they fluctuate, only because they have not taken due pains to inform themselves. They are ignorant; not religion and morals destitute of proof: and instead of slighting, they should study them. Or

supposing, after some inquiry, that they cannot determine: this happens in many cases, where further inquiry affords full evidence; concerning the main point at least, if not every particular. But were we to remain ever so much at a loss, when we have done our best: not knowing things to be true, is an exceedingly different state from knowing them to be false; how apt soever we are to confound the one with the other. In the affairs of this world, men may be quite in suspense about matters, which yet are very important realities: and it may be of the utmost consequence to them, whether, during that suspense, they act rightly or not: nay, while it is ever so uncertain, what they are to think; it may be very clear, how they are to behave: and, by following or transgressing that rule, they may as truly deserve well or ill, as by any other part of their conduct. Why then may not the case be the same, in respect to those, who have not arrived at certainty concerning religious and moral obligations? Why may not such doubts be one part of the trial of their behaviour; as well as other perplexities are of the behaviour of other persons?

Being profane and vicious, because they do not see clearly, is determining, instead of doubting: and determining on the side, that is not only prejudicial to all around them, but dangerous to themselves. For it is exceedingly little, were all things well considered, that we can almost ever get by wickedness: but what we may suffer by it, is infinite. The fruits of it in this life are usually found very bitter: nor is there any shadow of proof, but another may succeed it. And if there should, innocence here cannot possibly hurt us hereafter: but guilt runs a double risque; not only as uneasy reflections naturally follow it, but as farther punishment may be justly inflicted on it. The slight-

est sense of duty, that we can experience, should have made us at least suspect, that so peculiar a feeling as that, is not to stand for nothing in our composition. And if men will do, what they are told, by a secret voice within, they ought not ; it is fit they should take the consequences, in the next world, as well as the present. For it is knowing they did ill, not knowing they should be condemned for it, that makes their condemnation just. And though acute and subtle reasoners may easily build up a specious system of doubts and questions, yet this is a poor defence to rest the whole of their beings upon : especially as men have so irresistible a conviction, that right and wrong are notions of great consequence, when their own rights are invaded ; that they cannot in earnest think them idle words, or matters of indiffence, when their neighbours are concerned ; let them say what they will.

And therefore we may now go on to a third supposition ; that men acknowledge the obligation of morals, but not of religion ; and let us consider, what they are to do. They almost universally take the liberty of doing one very bold and wrong thing, of most extensive bad effect. They model their notions of morals, just according to their own fancy ; and reduce them into as narrow a compass, as they think convenient. So that, while they talk very highly of virtue, they practise little or nothing of it : or, if they observe some duties strictly, yet others, though it may be, scarce of less moment, but less agreeable to them, they neither regard, nor acknowledge, but hold them in utter contempt. Thus one part of the world transgresses the rules of sobriety and chastity ; another lives wholly to idle and expensive amusements ; a third is wickedly selfish or ill-natured in private affairs : a fourth unreasonably vehement in public ones ; and yet

all contrive to overlook their own faults in these points, and admire their own goodness in others: whereas to be truly good, we must be so in every thing alike. But inclination easily prevails over principle, where it hath not the sanction of religion to strengthen it. And they, who profess nothing beyond morals, not only are destitute of that higher aid; but, though their lives fully shew how much they want it, very commonly affect a scorn of it, no way to be accounted for. Suppose them doubtful even about natural religion; they must own, that, could it be proved, nothing in the world could influence men to virtue, like it. The fear of punishment, the hope of reward, from the King and Lord of all, the consciousness of living continually in his presence, reverence of his perfect holiness, love of his infinite goodness, reliance on his infinite wisdom and power, are evidently the strongest motives to right behaviour in every station, that can be proposed. They must own too, that the most thoughtful and able men in all ages, have held these motives to be well grounded; that the proofs in favour of them have considerable appearances of being conclusive: and, had they none, it would furnish no cause of triumph, but of the deepest concern to every lover of virtue. Such a one therefore, however uncertain, will abhor the thought of treating so beneficial, so respectable a doctrine with contempt and ridicule: a shocking manner, which frivolous and wrong minds are strangely fond of, on many unfit occasions: and indulging it, thoroughly misleads them from good sense and discreet conduct, in every other article of life, as well as this. On the contrary, the slightest apprehension, that there only may be a just ruler and judge of the world, will give every well-disposed person great seriousness of heart in thinking upon these subjects, and great decency in

speaking of them: will incline him to seek for, and pay regard to, any degree of farther evidence concerning them, that is real, though perhaps it falls very short of what he could wish: and will engage him, in the mean time, to behave with all the caution, that becomes his present situation. For, in a case of such importance, even small suspicions ought to lay us under no small restraints. Therefore he will let nothing ever escape him, which may induce others to throw off what he only doubts of: he will never solicit them to transgress the precepts of religion, while they acknowledge its authority: (things palpably wicked, and yet commonly done:) he will much more discourage a groundless neglect, than a groundless belief and practice of it: and he will think himself bound to act thus, not in prudence only, as even men of no principle are, but in conscience also.

These then are the duties of such, if any such there be, as admit the reality of virtue, and are doubtful concerning any thing farther. But indeed the generality of men profess to go so much farther, as to believe in natural religion, whatever they may think of Christianity. Let us therefore consider, in the fourth place, what their obligations are. And we shall find an addition of very considerable ones incumbent on them, if they deserve the title they assume, that of Deists: in which word, according to its original import, regard to the Deity is principally, if not solely, expressed. But notwithstanding this, it hath now for a long time signified much more determinately, that men do not believe in Christ, than that they do believe in God. At least, the belief of some, who would take it exceedingly ill to be called by a worse name, amounts to little more than a general confused persuasion of some sort of first cause; probably an intelligent, perhaps a

beneficent one too: but with scarce any distinct conception of his being the moral governor of the world; much less any serious conviction, that he expects from us a temper and conduct of piety and virtue, as the only condition and means of our obtaining happiness and avoiding misery. Now if their faith comes short of this, they may very nearly as well have none at all: and if it comes up to this, it binds them indispensably to be very different in their practice, from what they too commonly are: to cultivate in their hearts that fear and love, which the greatness and the goodness of God require: to pay him outwardly that homage and worship, which our compound frame and the interests of society call for: to beg of him both light to discern truth, and strength to practise it: to make diligent and upright inquiry, what rules he hath pointed out for the conduct of man: to observe them all with the strictest care, however contrary to favourite inclinations: and to endeavour, as far as their influence reaches, that others also may feel and express the same deep sense of what they owe their Maker. These are evident duties of real believers in him: do they perform them? They talk in the highest terms of the sufficiency of reason, and the clearness with which natural light teaches every thing needful: doth it *teach them to live soberly, righteously and godly**? It is but too easy for them to excell, in this respect, the generality of such, as claim the title of Christians. Why will they not take so honourable a method of putting us, and our profession, out of countenance? They apprehend themselves perhaps to have been far more strict and careful than we, in forming their opinions: why will they not manifest a proportionable strictness in regulating their practice too? That would

* Tit. ii. 12.

be a powerful evidence, both to the world and their own hearts, that they are sincere in their pretensions: that they do not reject the doctrines of the gospel, merely to be excused from the duties of it: nor disown every other law of life, but one within them, that they may be tied to nothing, which they do not like. It would be uncharitable indeed to accuse them of this, without proof: but they would do well to examine, whether they are not guilty of it. For it is a dangerous temptation: and one thing looks peculiarly suspicious in many of them; that they have so little or no zeal for natural religion, and so vehement a zeal against revealed. Surely every one, who inwardly honours God, must be affected quite otherwise: and think both his conscience and his character concerned in shewing the warmest attachment to the former, and the mildest equity in relation to the latter. If he not only suspected, but imagined he knew the Scripture-scheme to be false, still he must own it to be a falsehood with the most amazing quantity of truth in it, that ever was: to give men, however it happens, beyond comparison, the rightest notions, the justest precepts, the joyfulest encouragement, both in piety and morals, that ever system did: and to have been *the light of the world**, so far as appears, from the very beginning of it. Our only knowledge of the existence of true religion in the earliest times, is from the discoveries recorded in the Bible, as made to the Patriarchs. The Jewish dispensation afterwards was for many ages the main bulwark of faith *in one God, the maker of Heaven and Earth*: nor probably was it from any other source, that the learned Heathens derived their chief acquaintance with divine truths, after they had forgotten the primitive tradition of them. Then lastly, the Christian revela-

* John viii. 12.

tion overturned, when every thing else had appeared incapable of doing it, Polytheism and Idolatry, immoral superstition and profligate vice, wherever it was preached: and though it was indeed perverted for a time to patronize, in some degree, what it had destroyed; yet, by the native goodness of its constitution, it recovered again; and is now professed by the Church, of which we are members, in greater purity, than elsewhere upon earth, Infidels themselves being judges. If therefore they have in truth the affection, which they cannot deny but they ought to have, for genuine, moral, rational piety, they must honour this institution, as an infinitely beneficial one; whether they confess it to be from Heaven, or not: and, before they even wish it disregarded, should consider, with no little seriousness, what effects must naturally follow. Would men really believe the being and providence of God, the obligations of virtue, and the recompences of another life, the more firmly, for disbelieving the Gospel? Would they understand their duty the better, for having no written rule of it? Would they judge about it the more impartially for being left to make it out by their own fancies? Would they think of it the oftener, for never being instructed in it? Or is there not the strongest appearance, that as from Christianity all the true knowledge of religion came, which even the enemies of Christianity have to boast of: so with it, all true regard to religion would be lost again? We have been making in the present age some trial of this: and the effects, in private life and public, have been such, that it is very hard to say, why either a good or a wise man should ever want to see, what a farther trial would end in. But, at least, such a one would have much more concern that men should believe and practise what reason and nature teach, than

that they should not believe and practise what revelation teaches. And even if he could think himself obliged to declare against the latter, be the consequences bad as they will, for the sake of what he imagines truth; (which yet unbelievers are not apt to consider as a point of such indispensable obligation, in other cases;) he would however do it in a fair, an honourable, a decent manner: never misrepresent, through design or negligence, the doctrines, the evidence, or the teachers, of the Gospel; never study to expose them to the hatred of men by invectives, or to their contempt by ridicule: but inform himself about them with care, judge of them with candour, and speak of them with good breeding and moderation. Widely different from this, is the conduct of our adversaries: who take all methods without scruple to engage on their side, the resentments of some, the avarice of others, the vanity of a third sort, the sensuality of a fourth: and notwithstanding, are able, it seems, to pass themselves upon unwary minds for great lovers of free inquiry: but, with a little attention, *by their fruits ye shall know them* *. Would God they were cool and serious enough to know themselves; and to remember, that neither doubt nor disbelief can ever excuse malice or dishonesty. Could they but bring their hearts into such a disposition, their objections would soon diminish, and our answers and arguments appear just and conclusive. To be satisfied of this, let us take a short view of the case of Christianity.

God may certainly inform men of most useful things, which they did not, and could not, else know. He may certainly bestow superior advantages on some ages and nations from motives of which we are ignorant, yet be sufficiently gracious to all. He may see cause

* Matth. vii. 16.

to reveal some things to us very imperfectly, and yet require us to believe what he hath revealed, though we are unable to comprehend what he hath not. He may give us commands, with adding the reasons of them, which yet we are bound to obey: for we ourselves do the same thing. He may appoint various forms of religion, suited to various places and times, full as properly as men appoint various forms of government. Farther still, he might as justly permit us to become what we are, frail and mortal, by means of our first Parents' transgression, as create us what we are, independently upon it. He is no less merciful in pardoning our sins on account of the willing sacrifice, which he hath provided for us, than if he had pardoned them without any at all. He is no less authorized to demand of us what he will give us power to perform, if we ask it aright; than what we had power to perform of ourselves. And he can as easily form our bodies anew, fitted for the purposes of a better life, as he could form them originally, fitted for the purposes of this. If some parts of his word appear hard to be understood, of small use, or even hurtful; many parts of his works appear so too. If the revelation, which he hath given us, hath often done harm instead of good; the reason and the affections which he hath given us, have done so likewise. These few considerations, (and there are many obvious ones besides, of the same kind,) would remove out of every honest mind most of the prejudices raised against the faith of Christians: which indeed, for the greatest part, bear full as hard against the universal providence of God, even against those proceedings of it, which we daily experience.

Then as to the evidence in favour of our religion: whatever difficulties may be started concerning particular points of it, taken singly; as there may, in the

same manner, concerning any evidence in the world ; yet lay together, in one view, the Scripture-narration of things from the beginning ; the consistency and connection of the scheme, though carried on for so many thousands of years ; the admirable temper and character of the author of Christianity ; the sublimity and reasonableness of its doctrines ; the purity and benevolence of its precepts ; the excellency of its means of improvement and grace ; the eternal and true felicity of its rewards ; the manifold attestations of its history and miracles ; the wonderful propagation of it through the world, and its primitive influence on the souls and lives of men ; the undeniable completion of many of its prophecies, and the evident room there is left for the fulfilling of the rest : all these notorious facts, thus united and combined, can surely never fail to convince every impartial examiner, that the system, they support, must be from God, and that the supreme happiness of man is to share in its blessings. Now the weakest degree of such a persuasion, far from being unworthy of regard, because it is no stronger, ought in all justice to produce a most inquisitive attention to further proof ; and, in the mean time, a conscientious practice of what already appears credible. For, though any one's belief exceed his doubts but a little ; yet, if it doth so at all, what prevails in his mind ought to regulate his conduct : and acting thus, he will soon experience his faith to increase. Setting himself to keep the commandments, will shew him clearly his want of the mercies acknowledged in the Creed : and labouring to behave suitably to his present light, will intitle him to that gracious promise of more, given by our blessed Lord : *If any man will do his Will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God**.

* John vii. 17.

The further and particular obligations of those, who have acquired this knowledge, and are established in the Gospel-faith, must be the subject of another discourse. But the general direction for such as are weak and less advanced, is undoubtedly that of the Apostle: *Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing: and, if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this unto you**.

* Phil. iii. 16, 15.

S E R M O N III.

1 THESS. v. 21, 22.

PROVE ALL THINGS: HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD:
ABSTAIN FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL.

IN discoursing on these words, I have laid before you the duty of carefully considering our obligations, in respect of piety and morals: and acting suitably to our convictions, on those heads. According as our notions of either vary, whether from our different means of knowledge, or different use of them, it must be expected, that our conduct should vary too. And yet I have shewn you, that, were it possible for men to disbelieve the authority both of religion and virtue, mere prudence and self-interest would put them under considerable restraints, in relation to each: that whoever only doubts concerning them, admits they may be true; and therefore should take the acknowledged safer side: that any degree of persuasion, in favour of virtue only, much more of natural religion too, should excite a proportionably serious regard to it: and that the lowest apprehension of the truth of Christianity, (which, I hope I proved to you, though briefly, hath the clearest marks of truth upon it) greatly strengthens every other tie; and farther binds men to inform themselves fully about it, as soon as possible; and give it respectful treatment in the mean time.

If then even these persons are to behave thus, how are we to behave? The doubter, nay the Infidel, is

obliged to no small care of his heart and life: what is the believer obliged to? We pride ourselves on being such: pity or detest those who are not: and yet, all the while, Christians who think and act otherwise than Christians ought, may deserve full as ill, perhaps much worse, than they: indeed may be one chief cause, that they are what they are. Leaving others therefore to the Judge of all; let us at present think of ourselves: consider, what manner of persons our holy profession requires us to be; and whether we so observe its rules, that we may justly hope to attain its end: escape *the wrath to come**, and *partake of the glory that shall be revealed*†. Now it plainly requires,

I. That we be duly affected by the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. Many that profess it, and are persuaded of its authority, seem to have no notion almost of its value, or of any great regard owing to it. They say, it is designed intirely to make men live good lives: and accordingly if they do but live what the world calls a good life, the design is answered. As for matters of mere faith, or even of practice beyond this, they conceive there is little need of being concerned about them: and thus they are very good Christians in their own opinions, with scarce any thing to distinguish them from good, or perhaps even from indifferent, Heathens. In this error, the artful enemies of the Gospel studiously confirm its inconsiderate friends. For thus, pretending by no means to oppose it, but only to rectify mens' notions about it; and making loud complaints, if they are suspected of any thing worse; they can destroy, where they gain credit, the whole effect of what it adds to the religion of nature: and induce the unwary to imagine, there is nothing in it, worth contending for, besides

* Matth. iii. 7. Luke iii. 7.

† 1 Pet. v. 1.

those practical, social, and real duties, as they are pleased, by way of distinction, to call them, *which our reason and senses prescribe in common to us all*; and which therefore we may learn and observe as well without, as with the Bible; where they lie mixed with many other things, useless, if not hurtful; and are either misrepresented by the writers themselves, or very liable to be mistaken by us. But indeed, if the very writers of Scripture, with the Spirit of God to assist them, misunderstood the doctrines of revelation; he both chose and guided them extremely ill; nor have we any possible means of understanding those doctrines now. And if either they or we understand them at all; our Maker expects from us the belief of many things undiscoverable by reason, as points of great consequence to our eternal well-being; as with good cause he may. The knowledge of our fallen estate shews us our original destination, and our present need of help from above. The incarnation and death of God's eternal Son could not be appointed by him for purposes of small importance: and his word acquaints us, that blessings of the highest importance depend on what he hath done and suffered for us: on his atonement and mediation, our title to pardon of sin; on the Grace of the Holy Ghost whom he sent, our ability of performing acceptable obedience; on both, our resurrection to eternal life; on our belief of these things, our interest in them. If then the Gospel be true, its peculiar doctrines are of the utmost moment: and the duties grounded on them, which we owe to God, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; to his Son, as our Redeemer; to his blessed Spirit, as our sanctifier; are both as real, and as weighty, as any possibly can be; fully equal in their obligation, and superior in their rank, to the most valuable ones

of human society. They therefore who neglect them, lead very wicked, instead of good lives : and they who esteem them lowly, dishonour the author of them. It is true, reason cannot prove them : but it doth not contradict them. They are taught in Scripture only : but they are taught there by the all-wise God : and he cannot have left us at liberty to model his revelations according to our own fancies ; admit part, and reject part : but we are to take the whole plan of our salvation, as he hath delivered it : believe it, though implicitly ; and respect it, in proportion to the stress laid upon it by him, who must know. This will naturally dispose us,

2. To perform the next obligation incumbent on us : paying a due regard to the peculiar institutions of Christianity. Great numbers appear to have some how persuaded themselves, that several things, which they must acknowledge their Maker hath appointed, as the ordinary means of heavenly grace and spiritual improvement, may notwithstanding, nearly, if not quite, as well, be let alone. Baptism indeed they do practise : but with plain marks of considering it, as a mere empty ceremony ; not, as our Saviour hath declared it*, the express and original condition of our claim to all the mercies of the Gospel-covenant. Laying on of hands in Confirmation, after proper instruction and a personal engagement to live piously and virtuously, though evidently a very affecting and useful rite, and reckoned, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, amongst *the principles of the doctrine of Christ*† ; is yet desired, in proportion, but by few. Receiving the holy Eucharist, though a duty of all Christians, enjoined by our blessed Redeemer, almost with his dying words, and declared by St. Paul, to be *the communion of his body and blood*‡, that is, a participation of the benefits of

* Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 5. † Heb. vi. 1, 2. ‡ 1 Cor. x. 16.

his death ; is yet, I fear, entirely omitted by most practised by many of the rest, very seldom ; and by some from very improper motives : and such reasons are pleaded for the neglect, as have either no weight at all, or equal weight against the hope of future happiness. Praying to God is a dictate of natural, as well as revealed religion. And yet were a great part of you here present questioned, how constantly you pray in private, indeed when you prayed last, and whether you are careful to do it with attention and seriousness, or look on it only as a matter of course ; what answer must you give ? And as for public worship : how many are there, who yet call themselves Christians, that hardly ever attend it ? And how do many others think and speak of it ? Perhaps as matter of curiosity and amusement. If they can hope for an entertaining discourse after it, they will condescend to come and do homage to him, that made them, or seem to do it : otherwise they will not. Or perhaps they vouchsafe to attend it as matter of decent example and propriety. Accordingly in some places they always go to church ; in others, never : forgetting, that the latter will be known, and will influence, full as much as the former. Or the least trifle in the world shall determine them, sometimes the one way, sometimes the other. And both doing and omitting it they talk of, in an easy, gay manner, as a thing of no consequence at all. Nay, too often, it is directly pleaded, that they can spend their time as well, or much better, another way : for they know beforehand every thing that is told them here. Now, not to inquire particularly, in what better things, that they could not find leisure for else, those persons actually spend the time of divine service, who tell us so frankly they can : possibly they may, some of them, a little over-rate their knowledge : at

least, they frequently seem to have great need of being reminded, if not taught: and had they none, another and higher duty, for which we meet, is prayer. But to this, and all other acts of devotion, they object, that true devotion is in the heart; and outward shew is nothing material. Why, so is true loyalty, true friendship, every true virtue. But are we therefore bound to give no external demonstration of them? At that rate, what would they be worth, and how long would they last? God indeed doth not want such demonstrations: but we want them, to keep alive our sense of duty to him: the world around us wants them, to spread a like sense amongst others: and, were the benefits of his institutions much less evident than they are; still they are his, and we may be sure he hath reason for them. A good subject will go beyond, rather than come short of, what the laws require, in paying honour to his prince. A penitent criminal will not fail to sue out and plead his pardon in due form, let forms, in themselves, be things ever so insignificant: if he did, purposely or negligently, he would well deserve to forfeit it. Every man of common prudence, on whom, or his family, any thing valuable is bestowed on certain conditions, will think it of consequence to qualify himself, or them, according to those conditions, whether he sees the particular use of them or not. If then we think such behaviour necessary in all temporal concerns, why not in spiritual? God is our King, and hath prescribed to us the manner of doing him homage. He is our Judge, and hath directed us to the method of escaping punishment. He is our gracious benefactor, and hath notified to us the means of obtaining his favours. Why shall any one thing, thus ordered by him, and therefore undoubtedly ordered in wisdom, be

either omitted, or observed with contempt? Surely this is by no means the spirit with which sinners ought to receive a tender of forgiveness; and mortals, of eternal life. The epistle to the Hebrews directs the first Christians, even in the midst of persecution, *not to forsake the assembling of themselves together*, which comprehends every public office of religion; and laments that *the manner of some was* to do otherwise*. How guilty then must they be, who are now of this number; or put on the appearance of despising the ordinances of Christ, at the same time that they use them; and, though really, to some degree, serious in them, are afraid of being thought so! But this leads me,

3. To a farther obligation we are under, which is to profess our regard, both for the doctrines and the institutions of the Gospel, openly and boldly, on all fit occasions. It is a reproach, I believe, peculiar to the Christians of this age and nation, that many of them seem ashamed of their Christianity: would not perhaps be said to have thrown it aside, yet would by no means be imagined much in earnest about it: and therefore study, if possible, to conceal their way of thinking: or, when they are attacked upon it, excuse their piety, as others do their vices, with a sort of laughing half defence; and shift off the subject, as well and as soon as they can. A most astonishing treatment of what our eternal happiness depends on: especially when our Saviour expressly requires us to *confess him before men*, as ever we expect, that he should *confess us before his Father which is in Heaven*†. It is not meant, that we should be affectedly forward in talking of our religion; but, whenever we are called to do so, unaffectedly own it, and stand by it. In such a case, dissimulation, or even reserve, is a mean spirited deser-

* Heb. x. 25.

† Mat. x. 32.

tion of the worthiest cause in the world: and the words of the holy Jesus on another occasion are justly applicable to this, that *he, who is not for him, is against him**. Whoever is unwilling to be taken for a pious and good man, runs a great risque of soon becoming a profane and bad one. Open profession would have restrained him from doing wrong, and others from tempting him: whereas a timorous concealment exposes him both ways. At least it gives the irreligious a pretence for saying and imagining, either that every one thinks as they do, or that no one can defend thinking otherwise: and deprives those, who are better disposed, of a very animating and needful support. For no inticement to neglect our duty is so dangerous, as the appearance of a general neglect: nor any persecution so effectual, as that of public scorn. Therefore we should combine to shelter one another from it: declare frankly and with spirit, in our private conversation, as well as by our attendance here, what side we are of: not be afraid of a little, perhaps only seeming, contempt from those, who are the justest objects of pity themselves; but be willing *to suffer the affliction of shame, amongst others, if it must be so, with the people of God†*: the number of whom is not yet become so small, or so destitute of able advocates, but that, would they unite for that end, they might abundantly keep each other in countenance, and their adversaries in awe. We have every possible reason to be zealous in our cause. Unbelievers have no single good one to be so in theirs. Yet they are active, and we are remiss: and what will this end in, unless we change our conduct? But then if we do, there is a

4th, Most important obligation incumbent on us,

* Matth. xii. 30. Luke xi. 23.

† Heb. xi. 25.

that of tempering our zeal with mildness and charity. We ought indeed to *contend earnestly for the faith**, whenever it is opposed: but in a manner worthy of it. Cruel actions, opprobrious words, inward ill will, unjust bad opinion, are absolutely forbidden us, even towards the enemies of the gospel: and upon the whole, we do treat them with a moderation, which they are far from imitating. But still more gentle should we be to such, as believe Christianity, but only misunderstand it: especially considering, that we are just as liable to mistake, as they. And it is a melancholy consideration, that whilst one part of those, who profess our religion, are so cool about its general and essential interests; most of the other are so immoderately warm about their own particular systems and persuasions. Not only the maintainers of established opinions are apt to judge hardly of the rigid opposers of them, and they to return it: but many, of greater latitude, cry out for liberty to themselves, though they enjoy it to the full, with a spirit of persecution: and whilst they claim an unbounded allowance for every new notion, will give none to those who retain the old; but throw imputations or contempt upon them, without equity or mercy. What can be the consequence of this, but what we experience: that the bitter things which we say of one another, unbelievers, with seemingly good reason, will say after us: and when we have taught them to condemn the several sorts of Christians, and especially their teachers, as the worst of men, will, by a very plausible inference, condemn Christianity, as the worst of religions? How zealously soever therefore contending parties may *hold fast* what they profess: yet, violating the most indisputable duties by their vehemence for disputable doctrines, they provoke great numbers to sit

* Jude 3.

loose to all profession ; and do incredible harm to the religion, which they would serve. For, let us try what methods we will, nothing can ever so effectually promote true faith, as joining to practise true charity. But however unanimous Christians may be in other respects, they will neither do honour to the Gospel, nor receive benefit from it, unless they are also careful,

5. To be seriously and uniformly pious and virtuous. Yet, most unhappily, whatever else we differ in, we agree but too well in neglecting this. Multitudes call themselves Christians, who seem never to have thought of any care of their conduct ; but make a solemn profession of the purest and holiest religion, that ever was ; and at the same time, throughout their lives, do every thing that they are inclined to, and nothing else. Others that will observe some restraints, would find, upon a fair examination, that they follow their passions, perhaps in as many or more cases, than their principles ; or, which comes to the same thing, accommodate their principles to suit their passions. And even they, who have little of any bad inclination to lead them wrong, are very frequently led almost as wrong by indolent compliance with bad custom. For from whence is it, that the generality of men form their rule of behaviour ? Not from Scripture, or from reason : but from fashion and common practice : whatever they find people of tolerable reputation do, that they do likewise. When a farther step of wrong indulgence is publicly taken, they proceed to take the same : or, it may be, one somewhat less : the duties, which others throw off intirely, they practise rarely, and with indifference : the liberties, which others indulge without reserve, they approach towards with hesitation and by degrees : but as the

world goes on from bad to worse, they go on too; and imagine they are perfectly safe, because they are a little behind. Now men should not indeed be superstitiously scrupulous; but they should be conscientiously attentive to their hearts and lives; and reflect what ought to be done, as well as observe what is done. The Gospel forbids, instead of recommending, *conformity to the world*:* by no means with an intention, that we should be singular in matters of indifference, but resolute against compliances unlawful or dangerous. Christians, far from being permitted to follow others into sin, are designed to lead them into piety and virtue: to be *the light, the salt, of the earth*:† not to set an example of useless rigour, much less of uncharitable censoriousness; but of punctual and impartial adherence to every rule, which God hath appointed by reason or Scripture, and faithful endeavours to attain the great end of his appointments; for without that, the exactest outward regularity is empty form. *Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned*:‡ a sincere spirit of love and reverence towards our Maker, our Redeemer and Sanctifier; of justice and goodness to our fellow-creatures, of reasonableness and moderation, with respect to the advantages and enjoyments of the present life; for in these things consists our fitness for a better. This then is the real temper of Christianity. And if we have either never felt it, or perceive ourselves declining and deviating from it; our hearts growing fond of worldly objects, and sinking down into that supine disregard to God and our duty, and a judgment to come, which is undeniably the prevailing, and likely to be the fatal, distemper of the present age: our case

* Rom. xii. 2.

† Matth. v. 13, 14.

‡ 1 Tim. 1. 5.

and our remedy are plainly laid down in that awful exhortation to the church of *Sardis*: *I know thy works: that thou hast a name, that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful; and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.—Remember, how thou hast received and heard; and hold fast, and repent. If thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief; and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.** But then to do this effectually, we must obey the whole injunction of the text: and not only *hold fast that which is evidently good*, but,

6. and lastly, *abstain from all appearance of evil*. It might be translated, from every kind of evil. But even then, the sense would be much the same. For though doing what we know to be wrong is a grosser kind of wickedness: yet doing what appears to us wrong, though we are not sure of it, is a real kind: and even were we absolutely doubtful, still, if taking one course may be acting amiss, and taking the contrary cannot; the general rule certainly is, to lean always towards the securer side: for why should we run into danger needlessly? And yet what numbers of miserable creatures are there, whom the observance of this one direction would have made happy: who saw the safe path, but would prefer the pleasing one; exulted in it for a while, then were ensnared of a sudden, and lost perhaps for ever! Nor is it pleasure only, but interest, power, vanity, resentment, every thing within us and around us, in its turn, that may endanger our innocence, by tempting us to venture upon what we hope, but are not satisfied, is lawful. *Go not therefore in a way, wherein thou mayest fall: be not confident in a plain way.†* Even such actions, as appear to us very allowable, yet, if they appear evil to others, it is,

* Rev. iii. 1, 2, 3. † Eccclus. xxxii. 20, 21.

ordinarily speaking, both our prudence and our duty to abstain from, as much as, with tolerable convenience, we can. Whatever indeed, on mature consideration, we are fully persuaded we ought to do, that we must do, let the world think as it will. But where we apprehend a thing to be only permitted: if the wise will disapprove it, or the injudicious misinterpret it; if the good will be afflicted, or the bad rejoice at it; if rigid and warm tempers will be guilty of censuring us for it rashly; or easy and complying ones follow us in it, against their judgments; if our taking harmless liberties will encourage others to take sinful ones: in short, if any how, by doing what otherwise we might, we shall induce any one else to do what he ought not: the great law of Christian charity requires, *that no man put a stumbling-block, or occasion to fall, in his brother's way*; or do any thing, whereby he is grieved, or offended, or made weak.* Shewing this tender care neither to intice nor provoke a single person, if it can be avoided, into sin, of whatever sort, but to *please our neighbour for his good, to edification*,† is a precept, I believe, peculiar to the Gospel: or at least hath so peculiar a stress laid on it there, as to distinguish our religion, greatly to its honour, from every other institution of life, that the world hath known.

After such an addition to all the rest, there cannot be a completer provision imagined, by rules of behaviour, for the virtue, the peace, the eternal felicity of mankind. And therefore nothing remains, but what must depend on ourselves; that, having the best and fullest directions, the noblest promises, the most gracious helps, we think seriously, while it is time, what use we ought to make, and what we do make, of these advantages. The word of God will shew us the first:

* Rom. xiv. 13, 15, 21.

† Rom. xv. 2.

our own consciences, if honestly consulted, will tell us the latter. Happy are they in the highest degree, who can stand the comparison of the two: and happy they, in the next place, whom a deep sense, that at present they cannot, excites effectually to earnest supplications, and faithful endeavours, that they soon may. I conclude therefore with the words following my text. *The very God of Peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

* 1 Thess. v. 23.

S E R M O N IV.

LUKE xii. 57.

YEA, AND WHY EVEN OF YOURSELVES JUDGE YE NOT
WHAT IS RIGHT?

THE duties, which God hath enjoined us, though reasonable and beneficial in the highest degree, are yet, through the depravity of human nature, and the prevalence of bad customs, become so unacceptable, that they are practised, as we must be sensible, but imperfectly by the best, and very little by the largest part of the world. Yet avowedly to neglect doing what they ought, is too shocking a behaviour to sit easy upon the minds of men. Some plea therefore they must find out, either to justify, or at least to excuse, their manner of life. And various are, and ever have been, the excuses, invented by the irreligious and immoral, not only to maintain some character amongst others, but chiefly to quiet themselves.

Now of all these, one of the best, if it were a true one, would be that of ignorance: not knowing that such and such things are incumbent on us. This appears to be a case, to which not only compassion must have regard, but which even justice itself must acquit of guilt. And therefore it is no wonder, if many shelter themselves under so favourable a pretence.

The lower part of mankind, in general, on almost every occasion, alledge, that they have not the advantages of education and instruction which others have:

that they are not able, perhaps even to read that holy book, in which their duty is set forth: and if they be, yet the same quickness to understand it, or leisure to study it, cannot be looked for from them, as if their minds had been improved by rules of reasoning and judging, and their time at their own disposal. A great deal they think may be required, with the utmost reason, from those of higher rank: but from such as they are, little or nothing.

But, besides this vulgar sort, there is also a learned kind of ignorance, pleaded by some, whose freedom of inquiry and superior sagacity hath given them cause, they apprehend, to be very diffident of many points, that others are firmly persuaded of. And therefore they argue, that, though it may be the duty of common people, who, for want of the means of knowledge or of abilities to use them, must believe what they are taught; though it may be right and necessary for them, in consequence of their belief, to practise virtue and piety very conscientiously; yet it must not be expected, that those of greater genius, who are more enlightened, and perceive many doubts in these matters, should put themselves under disagreeable restraints, merely on account of uncertain speculations; and conform their lives to the rigid precepts of Christianity, when they are really not well satisfied of the authority of it; nor, it may be, even of natural religion.

Thus, you see, the lowest incapacity and the highest self-opinion can urge in effect the same argument, to evade what men have no mind to. And I shall now shew, that in both it is inconclusive; and fully confuted by our Saviour's home question, *Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?*

These words appear, by the parallel places in the

other Evangelists, to have been originally designed against those amongst the Jews, who, from dislike of the strictness of our blessed Lord's morality, pretended ignorance of his divine mission, after he had given abundant proofs of it; when yet, without any separate proofs of it at all, the main things which he taught, carried their own evidence along with them, and every man's heart bore witness to their truth. They had seen miracles, of various kinds, performed in attestation of his claim: yet still they were not content without more, and those of their own chusing. *The Pharisees came forth, with the Sadducees also, tempting him, and sought of him a sign from heaven.** But he, with no less dignity than prudence, refused to gratify a curiosity, both ill-meaning and endless: and *sighing deeply in his spirit*, as St. Mark informs us,† at this perverse disposition of theirs; told them, with a kind, because needful, severity of speech, where the defect lay. *A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign:‡* your sinful inclinations and lives, not the want or the desire of sufficient evidence, prompt you to this demand: and *verily I say unto you, there shall be no sign given*, no such visible manifestation of divine glory as you insolently require, vouchsafed to this generation:§ nor is it requisite. *When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, there cometh a shower, and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, there will be heat, and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth: but how is it that ye do not discern this time?||* That is: on other occasions you appear very able to judge of things by the proper indications of them. How can

* Matth. xvi. 1. Mark viii. 11. † Verse 12. ‡ Matth. xvi. 4.

§ Mark viii. 12. || Luke xii. 54, 55, 56.

you then, with any colour of sincerity, pretend, that amidst so many prophecies fulfilled, and so many miracles performed, you have not, after all, sufficient conviction, that this is the season when the Messiah should appear, and that I am He? Nay, as to the principal part of my doctrine, which is the real cause of your antipathy to the whole; as to the great precepts of pure religion and uniform virtue, and your need of repentance and faith in God's mercy; what occasion is there for any farther demonstrations of them, than your own hearts, if honestly consulted, will not fail to afford? *Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?*

Now this method of reasoning is equally applicable to unbelievers and cavillers in all ages. It is in vain for them, to invent new difficulties, or magnify old ones, concerning the authority of our religion; while the reason of things, the truth of facts, and the nature of God and man, continue to exhibit so full proof of those fundamental articles of it, the eternal obligation of moral duties, the sinfulness of every one's nature and life, the necessity of repentance, and humble application for pardon and grace. And, since the true quarrel of such persons is against these doctrines, and these cannot be shaken: they had much better reconcile themselves to the whole, than make fruitless attacks upon one part; in which if they were to succeed, (as they never will) they would, in point of argument, be almost as far from their favourite scheme, of liberty to do what they please, and think highly of themselves notwithstanding, as they were before. Suppose there are some doctrines, against which they can find more objections, than their neighbours: there are surely others, of which they can discern more clearly the certain grounds. If not, they have employed their ima-

gined superior faculties to very ill purpose. Or, were they to doubt of ever so many points ; yet, if they take pains for it, and force themselves to doubt, hunting every way for difficulties, asking for no solutions, and turning a deaf ear to them when offered ; they have no more excuse for any part of their consequent wrong behaviour, than if they had no doubts at all. For the whole of their case is : they perplex things on purpose, in order to complain that they are not clear : walk with their eyes wilfully shut, and then insist, that they cannot be blamed, if they stumble ; for it is quite dark, and they do not see a step of their way.

But let us now proceed to those, who acknowledge themselves, as many of the former would, if they had more modesty, the less knowing part of mankind. Some of these profess a second-hand sort of scepticism ; built not so much on their own judgment, as that of their admired leaders just mentioned. But since the masters are indefensible, their implicit disciples must be yet more so. For, if the question is to be decided by the authority of men of letters and abilities, the greatest number and most eminent, beyond all comparison, have confessedly been always on the side of religion : even excluding the clergy, as interested in the case : which, however, is by no means thought a sufficient reason, in other professions, why men of known skill and probity should be disregarded, in what they unanimously affirm, after careful examination.

But the generality of the unlearned confess the obligation of Christianity most readily ; yet daily transgress its laws : and, when they are charged with their fault, plead ignorance, as we have seen, amongst other things, especially the lower part of them, to excuse their disobedience to the clearest revelation of God's will, that the world ever knew ; and whose early dis-

inction it was, that *the poor had the Gospel preached to them.** Why then may we not say to such, as our Saviour said to the Jews; *Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth?* You can judge in all the common affairs of life. You can attain to a competent skill, many times to great perfection, in your several employments, and trades: though attended with many difficulties, and requiring much application and dexterity. You can foresee, at a distance, what will make for your worldly interest, or against it: you can lay schemes, full of cunning and long reach, for guarding against dangers, retrieving losses, securing and improving advantages. What hinders you then from arriving at the knowledge of religion; which consists in things much easier to be understood: love and reverence to God, justice and goodness to your fellow-creatures, reasonable and virtuous government of yourselves, humble recourse to the divine mercy when you have done amiss, and faithful use of the divine assistance to amend? If you have instructors in the management of business, and the wisdom of this world: have you not instruction also in the precepts of a Christian life! one day in seven of your time, at least, you are not only allowed, but enjoined, to spend principally in learning and thinking of your duty. The word of God is read to you, if you are not able to read it yourselves: it is explained to you, if it be not already plain enough: and the most important parts are the plainest of all. The several articles of Christian faith and practice are taught you in your earliest childhood; and imprinted on your memory at the time, when impressions are most lasting. They are afterwards more distinctly proposed to you from this place, week after week; and inforced on you by motives no

* Matth. xi. 5.

less powerful than the love of eternal happiness and the dread of eternal misery. There is no sin you practise, no good action you omit, but you are publicly warned, at one time or another, of your fault and the danger of it ; and there is no doubt or scruple, that can disquiet you, concerning any branch of your behaviour, but you may open your case often to your more learned and more prudent neighbours, always to the ministers of God's word, and receive satisfaction about it. What possible room is there left then for pleading ignorance of your lord and master's will ? This is a description of the means of knowledge, with which the lowest and meanest among believers are provided. And even to these may be applied, though not in an equal degree, yet with great truth, what our Saviour declared to his immediate disciples : *Verily I say unto you, that many Prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things that ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them : but blessed are your eyes, for they see ; and your ears for they hear.** Ignorant and knowing are comparative terms : and men usually compare themselves with those, that are next them only ; and draw false conclusions from doing so. A Christian, of smaller opportunities for improvement than some of his fellow Christians, thinks every thing ought to be forgiven him for that reason. And yet, in reality, not only the admired sages of heathen antiquity, but the patriarchs that were favoured with communications from heaven, the prophets and penmen of Scripture under the Jewish dispensation, nay the immediate fore-runner of our blessed Lord himself, who saw him and conversed with him on earth, had less

* Matth. xiii. 16, 17.

means of acquaintance with the doctrines of religion, than the poorest disciple of Christ now may have, if he will. *Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, in the Gospel age, is greater than he.**

But it may be imagined perhaps, that the benefits of religious instruction are partially represented, and spoken of much too highly, by those who are concerned in dispensing them. Why, be it so then. Let us lay aside for a while the consideration of what you learn here. Your Maker hath by no means trusted you intirely to our care: but hath appointed your parents, your friends, every serious person around you, for your instructors too: nay, to co-operate with all these, he hath placed a faithful witness and monitor of his truths in every breast; and therefore the want of outward helps can never justify transgressors. What Moses said in God's name to the Jews, is true in relation to all men: *The Commandment, which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off: but the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.†* And what Isaiah said of Christianity, holds in proportion of natural conscience: *An high way shall be there: and it shall be called the way of holiness: the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein.‡* The duties of mankind are not so intricate and perplexed, but that a good heart, without a very sagacious head, may easily find its way through them. For the confirmation of this, let us take a view of the fundamental parts of practical religion; those which men are most apt to fail in; and see which of them all any

* Matth. xi. 11.

† Deut. xxx. 11, 14.

‡ Is. xxxv. 8.

one can fairly say he was ignorant of, or doubtful about, and had not the means of sufficient light to direct his steps.

To begin with the belief and worship of Almighty God. Is not every man capable of seeing, let him be ever so little acquainted with nature, that the heavens and the earth, the order of the seasons, the returns of day and night, the whole frame of things in general, is full of use and beauty; and must be the work of amazing power, wisdom and goodness? Doth not every man feel, that he is frail and dependent, that his life and being is not owing to himself, nor consequently, that of his parents to them, and therefore they all proceed from a superior cause? Doth not every man perceive, that he is *fearfully and wonderfully made*;* that the several parts of his composition are exactly fitted to the several purposes of life; the eye for seeing, the ear for hearing, each member for its respective end? And his inward inclinations and affections no less so, than his outward limbs? Must not every man be sensible, that the supports and conveniences, which he enjoys, are not supplied him merely by his own care; but chiefly by the providence of another, *who maketh his sun to rise,† his wind to blow,‡ his rain to descend*, his earth to be fruitful? Hath not every man heard it owned, that the more diligently any one part of nature is examined, the fuller proofs it affords, that an Almighty, all-wise and gracious Being, must be the author of the whole? And what he hath made, no doubt but he governs and superintends. This is the plain obvious account of things, that one should think must almost offer itself of course to every common mind, without any learning at all: and the deepest learning gives it the strong-

* Ps. cxxxix. 14.

† Matth. v. 45.

‡ Ps. cxlvii. 18.

est confirmation. Nor is it so much as pretended, that any account hath been attempted of the origin of the world, or any thing in it, different from what religion assigns, but it hath been either palpably false and absurd, or impenetrably dark and unintelligible. It being then so clear, that there is a Maker and Preserver of all, infinitely powerful, wise and bounteous, what can be more visible than our duty ; to praise him for his mercies, pray to him for the continuance of them, place our happiness in his favour, fear his displeasure, and do his will ? Surely the most ignorant among us that think at all, cannot but find all this written in their hearts : nor can the acutest and most artful dispute against it, without being self-condemned. And what then hath any one to plead for himself, if he lives regardless of him, *in whom he lives, and moves, and hath his being** ; without gratitude to his bounty, from whom all he hath, or can hope for, comes ; without obedience to his commands, who requires nothing of us, but for our own good ; without resignation to his will, who is rightful Lord of the universe, and uses boundless authority only to the purposes of infinite goodness ? Surely, as the Apostle reasons, since *the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made ; they are without excuse, who, when they know God, glorify him not as God, neither are thankful†.*

Let us now proceed to the duties, which we owe to our fellow-creatures. The sense of these, because they are of more immediate importance to the good of society, God hath imprinted with greater strength on our minds, than even that of our obligations to

* Acts xvii. 28.

† Rom. i. 20, 21.

himself. As it must be the will of him, who is so just and good to us all, that we should be just and good to one another; and from this principle, as the root, every branch of right behaviour springs: so he hath planted in our hearts a natural love of equity, a natural feeling of kind affection; a natural conscience, applauding us when we act according to these dispositions, condemning us when we violate them: and seldom do we deserve its reproaches, but either at the time, or soon after, we undergo them. Consider but a little more particularly, what the mutual duties of men are: honesty and fairness in their dealings, truth in their words, friendliness in their demeanor, willingness to forgive offences, respectful obedience to superiors, ready condescension to inferiors, tender love to near relations, pity and relief of the poor, diligent care to be serviceable to mankind in our proper station. Which one of these obligations (and all the rest are like them) can any pretend he was ignorant of, or doubtful about? Who of us all hath ever done an unjust, a hard, an ill-natured, a passionate, an undutiful, an insolent action; or lived an idle, useless life; and can truly say, he was not sensible that he did amiss? We all know, when others do amiss in these respects: and therefore we are very capable of knowing, when we do so ourselves. We may drown the voice of conscience in turbulent passions and vehement pursuits of profit or pleasure; we may coolly and deliberately refuse to obey it: but it will speak, and from time to time will be heard. And therefore it is not ignorance or doubt, but wickedness of heart, and *holding the truth in unrighteousness**, that makes us negligent of, and injurious to each other, so often as we are.

* Rom. i. 18.

The third part of our duty is the government of ourselves, according to the rules of sobriety, temperance, and chastity. Now who doth not know, that the observance of these virtues is right and fit: that the violation of them is prejudicial to the reason, the health, the reputation, the fortunes, the families of men, and introduces riot and madness, confusion and misery, into the world? Who doth not see, that superiority to the cravings of appetite, and scorn of irregular gratifications, is a worthy, an honourable character: and that excess, dissoluteness, and debauchery, hath something low and shameful in it: and still more so, as, by habitual indulgence, men come to be less ashamed of it? Can any one say, he did not know, that gluttony and drunkenness and promiscuous lewdness were sins: but thought them as consistent with the obligations of a rational nature, the good order of society, and the commands of his Maker, as moderation and self-denial? And if no man is capable of mistaking thus, why is not *the Judgment of God according to truth, against them which commit such things* *.

But further yet: doth not every man know in his conscience, that plain as his duties to God, his fellow-creatures and himself, are, he hath, more or less, transgressed them all; that he hath a nature continually prone to transgression: that therefore he needs both pardon for what is past, and assistance for the time to come; and that he can have neither, but through God's undeserved mercy? Or, however ignorant men left to their own reason may be through carelessness and wickedness, as they were indeed amazingly ignorant; or, whatever doubts they had, after sinning, concerning their forgiveness and ac-

* Rom. ii, 2.

ceptance, as they could not help having great doubts: yet at least must not every professor of the Gospel be sensible, both what he is to do, and what he may promise himself on complying with the terms which it proposes: and that these are, *repentance towards God, faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ**, and humble use of the appointed means of grace: of attention to the reading and preaching of God's word, earnest prayer, worthy participation of the holy sacrament? And how can he then plead ignorance hereafter, if he resolves now to live according to his own fancy, and to stand or fall by his own merits; and haughtily despises, or indolently neglects, applying, as a penitent sinner ought, to infinite goodness?

Upon the whole, since most of the main branches of our duty are thus obvious to our understandings of themselves; and all of them are constantly taught us, by the holy Scripture, by the laws of our country, by the opinion and consent of the wisest and best of mankind, by the instructions of persons appointed for that purpose; what account do we imagine we shall possibly be able to give, why religion, so easily apprehended, is so little practised by us? If any do not know what is commanded; it must be, because they avoided knowing it: if any doubt of the reality of the command; the reason is, that they desire to doubt: and how can we flatter ourselves, that any thing is excusable, which proceeds from a disposition of mind so grossly and wilfully wrong? Suppose a servant of ours had purposely kept out of the way of receiving our orders, or invented perplexities and cavils about the meaning of them, or the certainty of our having delivered them because he had no mind to obey them: would that justify him? Should we not imme-

* Acts xx. 21.

diately tell him, that what he easily might and clearly ought to have known and understood, he was inexcusable, if he would not know and understand? And what must we think of our great Master in Heaven, if we try to impose on Him with devices and tricks, that will not pass amongst ourselves?

But in reality men have not this excuse, if it were one. They do know, how they ought to behave; they do know that they ought *to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this world, looking for** the recompences of another: and they well know in the main, what particulars this obligation comprehends; how grievously they have fallen short of them, and what need they have to repent and humbly beg forgiveness and strength, through him who hath procured us a title to both. Nor can they pretend, that these are trifling matters: the happiness even of this life depends on them; or, if it did not, the all-seeing God hath enjoined them, as the conditions and the means of happiness in the next; the judge of the whole earth will inquire strictly at the great day into our performance of them; and there can be no good account given him, why a plain duty was omitted or transgressed. We can easily deceive ourselves: we can make specious pleas one to another for our failings; which the occasion that we have for allowances in our turn, incline us often to look upon very favourably in our neighbours. But, in the sight of God, supposing a thing incumbent on us, and supposing it easily known to be so: what can be said to the purpose, why we did not perform it? “We were poor and ignorant.” But we were not, or we needed not to have been, ignorant in this particular. “We were suspicious and doubtful.” But our doubts were af-

* Tit. ii. 12, 13.

fect, not real; or partial, not honest and upright. Or if we doubted ever so fairly about some things; why did not we those, of which we could not doubt? And even for the rest, why did we not take care, that our practice should be on the undoubtedly safer, that is, the virtuous and religious side? "But we had strong inclinations, that prompted us to the course we took." No wonder: here was the trial of our virtue; it was our business to have resisted them. "But human virtue is not sufficient." Therefore we should have applied earnestly for divine grace. "But we were surprised into wrong behaviour." It was our business to be watchful; and at least a habit and a life of sin cannot happen by surprise. In short, let us multiply pretences as long as we please, the very nature of duty implies, that it ought to be done.

Still there are some, especially in some circumstances, who are to a much greater degree excusable for the sins they are guilty of, than others. But yet an excuse is not a justification: and will least of all prove such to those, who instead of endeavouring to act right, set themselves to contrive reasons, why their acting wrong should be dispensed with. It is true, the very best have their faults: and faults not indulged shall be forgiven us, if we are truly sorry for them, and earnestly apply to God's mercy through Christ for pardon, and carefully watch against the return of them. But when men first allow themselves to sin, then stand on their own defence; and particularly, if they plead ignorance or doubtfulness of what they have such abundant means of knowing and being sure of: they must not hope that this conduct, if they persevere in it, can escape final condemnation.

It ought however to be acknowledged after all, that many have comparatively but low abilities, and small

opportunities for knowledge: and that to some, whose understandings are not weak, but perversely turned, greater opportunities are of small use; for what enlightens others, only dazzles them. And accordingly our Saviour most equitably considers these disadvantages; and acquaints us, ten verses before the text, that *the servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes**. But these words, though full of terror to the great, the learned and the wise, if they neglect their duty; by no means carry in them that encouragement to the poor, the illiterate, and slow of apprehension, which possibly they may seem to do. For they chiefly relate, not to such times as ours; but that in which they were spoken: when the Jews had great light, and therefore great guilt if they sinned; but the Gentiles were, and had been long, in profound darkness: *the times of which ignorance God is represented, as in comparison winking at; but now, in the Gospel Age, he commands, under severer penalties, all men every where to repent; because he hath given them a clearer knowledge of his pleasure, and a fuller assurance of his judging the world in righteousness*†. And yet it must be observed, our Saviour did not apprehend any one to have been so ignorant, even then, of his Master's will, as to escape being punished for transgressing it; but declares, that he who knew the least of it; *he who*, compared with others, *knew it not*; knew enough however to deserve being *beaten with stripes*; though fewer, than they should undergo, who with stronger conviction, and distincter perceptions of their duty, were equally transgres-

* Luke xii. 47, 48.

† Acts xvii. 30, 31.

sors of it. And how severe even the mildest punishments of a wicked life may be, God forbid we should any of us try. For whoever sins wilfully in hopes of suffering but little hereafter; for that very reason will be made to suffer a great deal.

The conclusion of the whole matter is, that we have reason all to apply to ourselves the prophet's words: *he hath shewn thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord thy God requireth of thee**. And though it still be true, that some ages of the world have been dark, and others blinded with false lights; that some men naturally see little, and others are strangely given to see wrong; yet, in general, the duties of life are level to the capacities of all men: and especially among Christians, but above all, Christians so peculiarly blessed with the means of instruction, as we of this nation are, no one can possibly, without either deliberate obstinacy, or intolerable negligence, continue unacquainted with what he is bound to do; or the recompence he is to expect, if he do it not. *For this is the Condemnation; that light is come into the World, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil†*.

* Micah vi. 8.

† John iii. 19.

S E R M O N V.

2 TIM. iii. 4.

——LOVERS OF PLEASURES, MORE THAN LOVERS OF
GOD.

THE wise and gracious Ruler of the world hath created us to obey him, and from that obedience to receive our proper share of happiness. He hath adapted a variety of satisfactions to the various parts of our frame : and taught us by nature, but more distinctly by his word, the due subordinations of each ; and the circumstances, in which we may or may not lawfully partake of them. Some of these are capable of being exactly specified : and in such we cannot transgress, without either acknowledging our guilt, or daring to deny the authority of the law. Many take the humbler method of the two ; and yet grow little, if at all, better : many the bolder, and grow continually worse. Both are frequently admonished, and may be left at present to their own reflections. But other cases admit only a general and less accurate description : which leaves room for those, who desire it, to go very improper lengths, and still imagine they are within bounds. Thus, in eating and drinking ; to use the good creatures of God with delight is certainly allowable : and therefore too many set their minds to a strange degree on the practice and the study of this meanest of gratifications ; and think they may load

and inflame themselves without scruple, provided they stop but at all short of shocking intemperance. Thus again what we commonly call amusements are in their nature innocent. God hath formed us for pleasing intercourse, and put mirth in our hearts with intent that we should exert it. The sprightly disposition of youth calls for gladsome activity: the fatigues of business, the infirmities of old age, the wearisomeness of ill health and low spirits, often require the best relief, that cheerfulness can minister. And not to allow, that our Maker considers *whereof we are made**, would be giving an idea of religion both unamiable and false. But then, just how far each of us may lawfully carry our indulgence, cannot be minutely pointed out. And therefore, instead of being contented to speak and think mildly of others, which would be a right use of this uncertainty; we are apt to be negligent of restraining ourselves, which is a very wrong one. For there are numberless things, in which limits cannot be fixed precisely, and yet considerable excesses are destructive. Now in all these, our ignorance ought to teach us a reasonable, though not scrupulous, caution: but especially in matters of gay entertainment: because the present age hath confessedly a peculiar turn that way. Whether the preceding ones had not other faults as bad, is out of the question: our concern is to watch against our own: for which purpose the text affords us a most equitable and comprehensive and trying direction; that we are not to *love pleasures more than God*: meaning, than our duty to Him. For, *this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments*†. Now he hath enjoined us very important duties: of improving ourselves in every thing worthy, and being service-

* Ps. ciii. 14.

† 1 John v. 3.

able to our fellow-creatures. What influence then upon these will our amusements, as we conduct them, have?

The more steadily we apply, without impairing our healths or faculties by it, to affairs of real use, the properer part we act in life. Do then indeed our serious occupations wear us down so, that we need all the time, which we take, to recruit ourselves? Or do we only, when we are tired of one trifle, run to another? Is it matter of humiliation to us, that we are obliged to spend so much of every day insignificantly: or do we take a pride in spending it thus; lead as many into the same way as we can, and throw contempt on those, whom we cannot? Have we impartially examined, what obligations, public and private, are incumbent on us: whether we are chiefly attentive to these, omitting none; or to what other things, and what the benefit of them is: whether it be any other, than keeping ourselves in humour, like froward children? We should do well to state the disposal of our time: first set down, how much we employ in each of our concerns of moment; then how much goes in diversions of one kind or another, in preparing for them, in refreshment after them, in needless company at home and abroad; and if the disproportion be great, think beforehand, how wretched a void and blank, at best, our lives will appear at the close of them to have been, should the remainder of them be wasted in the same manner.

We all wish to be distinguished to our honour. But in whose eyes will such persons, or a nation composed of such, be honoured? and for what qualifications? Knowledge and prudence require industry and experience to attain them: worth and probity require thoughtful self-inspection. And one doth not see, how they, who claim only outside pre-eminences,

can possibly esteem one another ; or why they should wish to herd so much together, unless to take comfort in their mutual want of merit. At least vain opinion will never convert shew into substance. We must surely know, that we are capable of more valuable accomplishments, and of delighting in them. Probably our education hath furnished us with some experience of improving our understandings and our tempers. Have we no room left then for farther improvements ? Or have we lost the relish of them ? And for what better have we exchanged it ? Or how unhappily soever we are bred, as indeed too many young people are extremely pitiable for having been taught the least of what was most worth learning ; yet we must be sensible, there are those who possess more solid endowments. Are they then of no value in life, or have they not in all ages been allowed to be of the highest ? Why therefore should we not strive to resemble them, and take a little leisure to think, how we may live to more purpose ? It may be, we do not desire leisure to think. It is unentertaining : it is painful. But what a figure do we make to others and ourselves, if we cannot bear our own company, but must fly to any thing, rather than fail to get rid of it ? Thought can be painful only because we are acting amiss : and then thinking so as to amend, is the only remedy ; and no case is too far gone for it. Perhaps we are unable to carry on solitary meditation to any good effect. But we can have recourse to the assistance of proper books. Idle reading indeed completes the destruction of the time, that idle conversation spares us. But judicious writings on the subject of conduct, religious, moral, and prudent, are at once the medicine and the nourishment of the mind. If still after these we want farther instruction, every

true friend we have, every good man we consult, will gladly give it us. And with such helps, why should we not assert our share in the dignity of human nature?

But possibly we aspire to appear advantageously both in weightier matters, and lighter. And by due application, most people may, as far as they need. But then the chief regard must ever be paid to the principal point. For even elegant and liberal and learned accomplishments have, by excluding still better things, greatly diminished the value of many characters. And when such attainments, as barely, if at all, rise above indifferent, or perhaps sink below it, divide our esteem with laudable ones, the mixture will do great harm, both to ourselves, and, by its example, to others. But when they are the main objects of our ambition; the applause of the unthinking, should we procure it, will be bought much too dear; the soul will lose its vigour and grow frivolous; matters of consequence become distasteful; by degrees the very notion which are so, will be effaced: and a group of the reigning follies of the time being, engross the heart. But particularly self-government will be forgotten in the midst of self-indulgences, that will pretend to be harmless, till they prove undeniably criminal. In these circumstances, the business of our stations, the examination of our affairs, the care of those who are most intimately connected with us, and, much more, the inspection of our hearts, of our state towards God, of our title to a happy eternity, will be continually postponed, or superficially hurried over, to comply with every trifling engagement, every sudden fancy, or even mere indolence. And perhaps, rather than take the pains of knowing and doing what we ought, we shall make it our refuge to profess a contempt of

it : in which absurd declaration, a natural or acquired fluency of lively talk will bear people out so well to those, with whom similarity of manners prompts them to associate, that before it is long, they will seem quite satisfied in neglecting every thing they should mind.

Yet all the while, what they call a life of pleasure is very often only an affectation of being pleased. They put on airs of great gaiety, and in truth their pleasures are flat and insipid: they relieve one tasteless scene by another a little different; are miserable in the intervals of their amusements, and far from happy during the continuance of them. Nay indeed, under colour of relaxations, they are, to those who engage thoroughly in them, sore fatigues; from which, whether they will confess it or not, relaxation is much wanted: and some undergo a speedy, and many a lingering, martyrdom to them. If religion enjoined men to mortify and macerate themselves at this rate, what dreadful names would it be called! In all likelihood, were the truth known, numbers would chose a quieter way of living, if one part of them could be sure, that the other would keep them in countenance. It is great pity therefore, but they should mutually explain themselves on this tyranny of fashion: and not go on together in wild chaces of imaginary pleasure, when they had all rather sit still. But farther, several, that would be sorry to quit their diversions, follow them only to banish reflection on some bad or imprudent thing that they have done, or course they are in. Now as this can be no better than a palliative cure, and will usually exasperate the disease, they ought to seek a more effectual remedy. And we should all consider, that probably the same entertainments will not for ever afford us the same delight: and yet by long

use it may grow or seem hardly possible to do without them, though they not only misbecome, but even tire us. Nay some, when they have once fixed it in their minds, that happiness consists in gaiety, and find the innocent sorts of gay enjoyments are become tasteless, venture, for the sake of a higher relish, on such as are pernicious even in this world.

Another consideration, both of prudence and duty, is, that the many expences of this public sort of life are excessive ; and to supply them, creditors are frequently left unpaid, except the least deserving ; due provision for children is omitted, and ignominious arts of raising money practised. Or if the votaries of pleasure do observe justice, let them ask their consciences, what proportion of their income goes in works of piety, mercy, encouragement of useful undertakings, and what in luxurious trifles. It will be said, that these last do good by setting the poor to labour. But is our intention to do good by them, or only to gratify our vanity and voluptuousness ? Besides, much more good is done by procuring health to the sick, right education to the young, instruction to the ignorant and vicious, or by durable works of general utility and national honour. And employing the lower part of the people in ministering to the luxury of the higher, can no more enrich or support a kingdom, than employing the servants of a private family in the same manner, can enrich or support that.

But one fashionable expence must be particularly mentioned ; that which bears the name, often very falsely, of play. Be it for ever so little, consuming much time in it, is the most unimproving and irrational employment that can be. But false shame and emulation frequently raise it to a very incommodious and distressing height, even amongst those who pro-

fess to be moderate. And the lengths that others go, are the most speedily and absolutely ruinous of all things. The more calmly men bear their losses, the worse ; if they are the less likely to leave off for it. But usually they feel most tormenting agitations : yet rush on to lose more, from a groundless hope of gain ; and perhaps at length call in dishonesty to the aid of imprudence. I am unwilling to name the worst act of desperation, to which extravagant and vicious indulgences too frequently lead. But surely it cannot fail to be visible, that deliberately and presumptuously ending an immoral and mischievous life, by the impious and false bravery of a voluntary death, instead of an humble and exemplary penitence, is the completest rebellion against God, of which the heart of man is capable.

Another considerable ingredient in the favourite amusements of the world, are public spectacles. And provided regard be had to time and cost, they might be allowably and beneficially frequented, if they were preserved from tendencies dangerous to virtue. But failings in that article totally alter the nature of them ; and gross failings reflect not only on our morals, but our taste. Indeed it is lamentable that, fond as we are of adopting the fashions and qualities of our neighbours, often much for the worse, we should not import what is praiseworthy in them, but suffer the most dissolute of them to excell us in the chastity of their dramatical representations : yet after all, were they ever so innocent, in proportion as they are trifling and insignificant, they are contemptible and unworthy of regard.

But the effects of less general amusements, even of those at our own houses, may be extremely hurtful, if they are the means of admitting persons of profligate

conduct and principles into familiar conversation and acquaintance with others. For hence they will have the encouragement of finding, that they need not either amend or conceal their faults to be well received. The inconsiderate, that is, most people, seeing little or no difference made between good and bad characters, will persuade themselves on occasion, that there can be no great difference between good and bad actions. But the young, above all, will be likely to admire those, whom it extremely concerns them to abhor. For, in spite of the most prudent cautions, which however are not always given them, they are easily imposed on by a shewy appearance, joined with plausible talk. And the common talk of such assemblies, though it were never openly to assault virtue, which yet may be especially feared in such of them where people converse in disguises, and are or may seem unknown to each other, hath notwithstanding many things to undermine good principles, and weaken right sentiments, particularly the continual supposition on which this whole way of living is built, that entertainment is the business of our being. They whose only school is the world, will think so of course: and in such places cannot be safely contradicted. Possibly, with all this, there may be no immediate strong symptoms of much harm suffered in them. But still as a course of sober intemperance may damage the health more, than great excesses now and then: so may a life, seemingly but a little too gay, corrupt the heart more, than a few acts of confessed immorality.

And besides the direct danger to morals, what influence will it have on piety? About that perhaps we are not solicitous. And yet the firm belief of a future recompence must be the best security of right behaviour in all circumstances. And the King of the whole earth

cannot but require to have the due respect and homage he hath appointed paid him by his subjects, as necessary to preserve that obedience to his laws, without which it is impossible they should be happy. Yet the public worship of God, even on that day which he hath appropriated to it, is almost intirely neglected by the greatest part of those who live to amusements; and by many of them professedly and contemptuously: though possibly attending it might afford them some instruction, as well as express proper duty. Much less do they regard any other seasons, appointed for the peculiar exercise of seriousness: but, it may be, affect to crowd diversions into the most sacred week of it; either in wanton defiance of public authority and common decency, or in ostentation of their imagined superiority to vulgar ways of thinking. But surely others know as well as they, that outward observances in themselves are nothing. But still, by their effects, both in civil and religious matters, they are very important things: and may be useful to the wisest persons. Though, indeed, when there is a little weakness mixed with piety and virtue, they have no title to ridicule it, who are guilty of the numberless absurdities of dissoluteness or profaneness. And though the most innocent superstition should be separated from religion if it can, yet not with the hazard of rooting up both together

But supposing we pay sufficient regard to these external proprieties, what disposition doth our attachment to pleasure leave us towards inward devotion? Do we pray to God in private? Is it with attention and reverence? And doth that regulate the rest of the day, or the rest of the day wear out the impression of that? Do we stately think of our interest in the divine fa-

your, and our approaching state after death, as our main concerns? And do we not only fear the Judge of all, but love the Father of Mercy, such as he hath exhibited himself to man, by giving his Son to die for us, and his Holy Spirit to move us to all good? or hath not our manner of living deadened our feeling of these things, if ever we had any: and are we not proceeding to efface the small remnants of them? This is not the behaviour of a rational creature, of a penitent for sin, of a candidate for eternal felicity: there can arise from it no *meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light*,* no susceptibility of spiritual happiness, no hope of *escaping the damnation of hell*.† Not only a few of our detached hours, but our whole being is God's, and to be employed as he approves. Our lawful daily business, nay our needful relaxations from it, we may humbly present to him, as part of what he designed us for. But can we offer up a series of nothing but idle dissipations or worse, and beg him to accept of that? Our baptismal vow promised other things for us: the holy Scripture hath prescribed us a very different sort of conduct: hath told us, that we *cannot serve two masters*;‡ that they, *who live in pleasure, are dead, while they live*;§ that he, who delighted himself splendidly every day, and took this for his portion, *lift up his eyes in torment*.|| And are we then willing, both to fail of reward, and suffer punishment? Perhaps the latter may seem unjust, merely for spending our days in harmless diversions. But if otherwise they were harmless, would not a servant of ours merit punishing, who for his own gratification should obstinately neglect his allotted share of work in

* Col. i. 12.

† Matth. xxiii. 33.

‡ Matth. vi. 24.

§ 1 Tim. v. 6.

|| Luke xvi. 19, 23.

the family ? Now we are the servants of our Maker ; and he hath forewarned us, that a *slothful servant* shall be deemed *a wicked one*.*

But the life of those, who love pleasure more than God, is fuller of guilt, in proportion as it gives others a more public invitation to live in the same way. If the rich and great proclaim, that voluptuous amusements are their passion, and religion their contempt ; as it will provoke the better part of their inferiors to think ill of them, which is a very undesirable thing, so it will incline the larger part, without thinking at all well of them, to imitate their example. For if they may behave so, the conclusion will be boldly drawn, that every one else may. And yet the effects of that persuasion must be insupportable. For how shall our domestics, and nearest relations, all we have concerns with, and the body of the people in general, be kept from every thing that is wrong and mischievous, in the midst of such numerous temptations, if they learn from us to make self-indulgence, unrestrained by the apprehensions of a future account, their governing principle ? Our laws cannot be executed with rigour : and legislators and magistrates will not be thought in earnest, or, if they are, will be thought injurious, when they prohibit what the practice of too many of them shews, they look upon as the only happy life.

People of fashion, especially of that sex, which ascribes to itself the most knowledge, have nearly thrown off all observation of the Lord's day ; perhaps keep such hours, that neither they, nor their families, can go to church, at least in one part of it : will vary those hours readily for any other purpose, but by no means for this. And when they have passed the morning and afternoon in neglect of piety, numbers of them

* Matth. xxv. 26.

pass the evening in what they know will be commonly interpreted, and the more for that neglect, an open contradiction to piety. Or if, to avoid scandal, they sometimes vouchsafe their attendance on divine service in the country, they seldom or never do it in town: where patterns of it are peculiarly needful; and from whence accounts of their behaviour will soon be spread to the remotest places where they have influence. Now by these means the Sunday, instead of being made, to those beneath them, the usefulest part of their time, by religious worship and instruction, reading and thought; as well as the pleasantest, by rest from labour and friendly intercourse; becomes the most pernicious. A large proportion of the tradesmen in these two cities usually spend the whole of it abroad in diversions, often vicious, always costly: and by affecting them then, get a ruinous taste for them throughout the week. The lower sort still are ambitious to follow them as close as they can, every day indeed, but on that especially: consume the beginning of it, in stupid sloth, the remainder in lewdness or drunkenness, which impair their faculties and destroy their health; besides intercepting the profits of their labour from those, whom it should maintain. And if they once come to think gaming also allowable on that only time, in which they have leisure for it; the losers will be yet more thoroughly undone and desperate, and the winners not the richer, but only the more debauched.

Every species of wickedness cannot fail to make a great progress amidst these licentious principles and practices: which are industriously propagated, both by the discourse of bad men contrary to all common prudence, and in books also, published not only against revealed religion, (which they who disbelieve will few of

them believe any, and none to any great purpose) but against a future recompence of human actions ; and suited, in the manner of writing, to every reader, and, in the price, to every purchaser. Such as have learnt these lessons, will yield, and no wonder, to the present solicitation of each appetite and each fancy, be the consequences what they may. When they are distressed, they will venture on whatever crime they think may enable them to go on a little longer : they will endeavour to conceal a first crime by a second ; and if at last they cannot evade punishment, they will despise it. For what is even death, which every one may make as easy as he pleases, if they neither hope nor fear any thing after it.

We of the clergy are principally concerned to oppose this torrent of impiety : and I trust we do it with faithful zeal. But the immediate answer to us is, that we are pleading our own cause : though indeed it is that of the public. And therefore the hearty concurrence of the laity, jointly countenancing, by their examples, their favours, their commendations, their reproofs, by reverence to religion, moderation in pleasures, frugality in expence, diligence in the business of every one's proper station, is highly necessary : and will complete the blessing of the fullest liberty, and most fatherly administration of government, that ever nation enjoyed ; which otherwise we are in imminent danger of abusing, to our own deserved ruin.

Yet too great strictness may do harm, or disqualify for doing good : and according to circumstances, partaking of amusements, that otherwise are not eligible, may be very prudent : besides that some may be under such authority and direction, as may oblige them in duty to what they cannot intirely approve. And then they should endeavour to do it both obligingly and

gracefully : but always remember, that they are on slippery ground : never go farther, than is really innocent ; never farther, than they need : much less, blame or despise those, who are unwilling or unqualified to bear a part with them : but carefully preserve a just preference for the higher order of obligations ; be humble in the midst of pomp, attentive to serious reflections in the midst of gaiety ; do all they can, without exposing themselves, to guard or bring back others : and seize every opportunity of promoting what is right, where too generally what is wrong abounds.

But they who are not called to enter far into the livelier scenes of this world, will do very commendably, to shew by facts, in a freer and opener manner, their settled persuasion, that happiness consists in quite other matters ; to shew, that they can enjoy themselves perfectly well, without having any relish for these ; nay, can abstain from them without difficulty, though they have a relish for them. And the more they do so, keeping up their good humour, the more exemplary they are. But the clergy should be patterns of this abstinence beyond all others. For if instead of being grave and studious and laborious in our profession we dissipate ourselves in vanities, or sink into luxurious delicacy or indolence ; the awe of our character, and the weight of our preaching will be lost : the thoughtless will imagine they may safely step a little farther than we ; and thus will fall into palpable sin : while the indifferent to religion and virtue will make it their boast, that we aim to be as like them as for shame we can ; and will *blaspheme*, on our account, *the worthy name, by which we are called*.*

Possibly so many cautions against fondness for plea-

* James ii. 7.

sure may seem to leave those who regard them, in a very joyless and uneasy condition. But indeed they are only plain and very practicable rules for that discipline of our temper and conduct, which is necessary for our true happiness even here, and for our eternal felicity hereafter. Christian piety allows us, under such regulations as are evidently reasonable, every enjoyment of sense, every delight of elegant taste, every exertion of social cheerfulness ; and forbids nothing, but mischief, madness and misery. Then besides, it heightens to the utmost all the nobler satisfactions of the mind : that of sincere good will to all men ; that of tender complacency in those, to whom we are united more nearly : whence proceed honourable esteem, and affectionate returns. Or, though we miss the regard we deserve from men, we shall have a reviving consciousness, that we have acted worthily, that we have laboured to promote goodness and happiness on earth, that the sins and sufferings of our fellow-creatures are not owing to us. This applauding testimony of our hearts will indeed be mixed with the grief of many failings : but also, with the assurance, that our heavenly Father forgives them, for the sake of our gracious Redeemer ; with the experience, that he is enabling us to overcome them, by the grace of our inward sanctifier, and preparing us daily for the blessedness, to which he invites us. For such mercies we cannot but love him : and whoever doth so, is in proportion beloved by him. The sense of this must give us great composure about every thing worldly, disdain of every thing vicious, and comfort in going through the very lowest and hardest acts of duty. We shall pass the days of our pilgrimage in as much delight as the nature of it affords : and when we come to our final abode, every capacity of spiritual enjoy-

ment, to which we have improved ourselves here, shall be inconceivably augmented, and completely filled: we shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's house, and drink of the river of his pleasures.* For in his presence is the fullness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore.†

* Psal. xxxvi. 8.

† Psal. xvi. 11.

S E R M O N VI.

HEB. xii. 2.

LOOKING UNTO JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH : WHO, FOR THE JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM, ENDURED THE CROSS, DESPISING THE SHAME, AND IS SET DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD.

DIRECTING our eye is necessary for guiding our steps ; and therefore the Apostle here directs the eye of our mind to Jesus Christ : whom if we so contemplate, as to learn what he was, and expects us to be, nothing will be wanting to carry us happily through the journey of life. And it may be useful to begin with considering his familiar manifestation of himself on earth, whence we shall naturally be led to consider his higher and more awful glories.

Now in this lowest view, we shall find him to have been the most amiable and the most venerable person, beyond all comparison, that the world ever knew. Meditate only with serious attention on the evidently artless account given of him in the Gospels, and you will see, with an admiration continually increasing, how perfect his character was in every point : how warm his sentiments, yet how just his notions, of piety to his heavenly Father ; how strong and affectionate his expressions of it ; yet how rational, and how peculiarly suitable to his very peculiar situation : how composed his resignation, though with the acutest feeling of all

that he underwent ; and how firm his trust in God even at the hour of death, under the most painful sense of the light of his countenance being withdrawn from him : how regular his practice of the whole of religion, yet how accurate his preference of one part of it to another : how active and bold and persevering his zeal ; yet how completely free from all the weakness, and all the bitterness, with which zeal is too often accompanied ; how intimately tempered with patience towards the slow of apprehension ; esteem for the well meaning though erroneous ; pity for the bad, though perverse and incorrigible : what perpetual demonstrations he gave, of benevolence and purity in his teaching, of goodness and condescension, meekness and tenderness, in his behaviour, to all persons, however provoking, on all occasions, however trying : yet goodness judiciously exercised, condescension with dignity, meekness with due severity against sin, tenderness without partiality, or improper compliances, to the nearest of his kindred, or the dearest of his disciples : how compassionate a love he shewed to his country ; yet how unlimited a good will to all the world : how remote he was from self-indulgence, yet how far from encouraging useless rigour and austerity ; how diligently he turned the thoughts of the multitude, from empty admiration of his discourses or his works, to the conscientious performance of their own duties ; declined the most favourable opportunities of rising to worldly power, and inculcated on his followers the strongest warnings of what he and they were to suffer : with what plainness he reprov'd both the people and their rulers, yet with what care he secured the respect owing from the former to the latter : with what simplicity and upright prudence he answered the objections and captious questions levelled against him, how-

ever suddenly attacked by them ; and, though in so public a life tried every way continually, never once was overcome, never once disconcerted : how surprizingly he avoided all the artifices and all the violence of his enemies, as long as he chose it ; and how much superior, not only to them, but, if possible, even to himself, he appeared, after he had put himself into their hands, during the whole of their barbarous and despiteful treatment. Nor can it fail to be observed, as a most important circumstance, that all his wonderful perfections were evidently natural to him, and sat absolutely easy upon him, without the least variation or inequality, or effort exerted to raise himself up to, or support, the highest excellence that he ever displayed. In short, the character of Jesus Christ, like the frame of God's creation, the more deeply it is studied, the more respectfully it will be admired. Some small particulars in each, yet much fewer than superficial observers imagine, it may be easier to cavil at, than to account for distinctly : but look at the whole of either, and to every eye that is capable of taking in a whole, it will approve itself uniformly great and good.

Now that he, of whom these things are recorded, was a real man, and not a phantom of the imagination, infidelity itself hath never denied. And that he was truly the excellent man, that the gospels describe him to have been, we have the testimony of numbers that knew him, of more who conversed with those that knew him ; who all asserted it in the strongest terms, and suffered every thing terrible for so doing. Their enemies were never able to disprove them : if they had, Christianity must have sunk : and indeed some of the most considerable of their enemies, in all ages, have owned them to be so far in the right. But if still it be pretended, that his portrait was drawn too favour-

ably ; who could draw it so ? The Greeks and Romans never drew any, either from life or fancy, without some capital fault. How came the Jews, how came the illiterate Evangelists, by such extraordinary skill ? And further, how came they to ascribe such mild, such passive virtues, to their Messiah, whom the whole nation expected to be, on the contrary, an enterprizing and prosperous warrior ? Had one of them deviated so unaccountably from the general opinion ; is it credible that they all should ? Had every one of them attempted to make a beautiful picture of that sort, without regard to the original ; would all their pictures have been like, yet each distinguished by such peculiarities, as proved none of them to be copied from the other ? Or supposing even that, could they have persuaded an unwilling world, that these resembled this original, when plainly they did not ?

Now if their narratives be faithful descriptions of a real person, well may we ask as the Jews did with another spirit, *Whence hath this man these things ; and what wisdom is this which is given unto him ? * Is not this the carpenter's son ? †* What education had he to form him, what patterns to form himself upon, to become the man he was ? By what train of thinking could he be led to conceive, by what prospects could he be moved to undertake, by what power was he enabled to accomplish, the unparalleled things he did ? To imagine that such a one existed by accident, is monstrously unreasonable. But that he should also have fallen by accident, just into that single country, in which there was a system of religion, that he could build on, with a series of predictions applicable to himself ; and just at that period too, which

* Mark vi. 2.

† Matth. xiii. 55.

these predictions had so pointed out, as to raise an universal expectation of him: that under all the disadvantages of a low condition he should have spirit enough to make and maintain the highest of claims, sagacity enough to interpret the ancient oracles in a much sublimer and juster sense, than any of the most learned instructors of the people, and self-denial enough to prefer, in consequence of these interpretations, persecution and crucifixion before the safety of a private station, or the splendor of offered dominion: that every one of these things, (and others equally strange might be added) should meet in the same man, without the especial appointment of heaven, exceeds all power of chance. Consider him only as a mere man, he appears to have been unspeakably the greatest and best of men. Consider only those consequences of his coming into the world, which even unbelievers must acknowledge, he appears to be the most important person, that ever did come into it. The general reasonableness of his doctrine, the coolness of his temper, the composedness and familiarity of his whole conversation, prove he was no enthusiast: the unvaried goodness of his life, the willingness with which he suffered death, the impossibility, which his understanding could not but see, of attaining any worldly advantage by the course, which he took; nay indeed, the difficulties which he left in some articles of his scheme, and needed not, if he had contrived it to serve a turn, prove full as evidently, that he was no impostor. What must he have been then? And what else can we gather from his whole behaviour, than what the spectators did from the finishing scene of it upon the cross: *Truly this was the Son of God**?

* Matth. xxvii. 54.

But if indeed a title so transcendant belongs to Jesus, we are surely bound to learn, with the utmost docility, from the scriptures written by his direction, what it comprehends, and what is connected with it. There we read, that *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God** : that by him the Father created all things, and by him hath conducted, ever since, the concerns of this world ; whence he is called, in the text, *the author and finisher of our faith*. He laid the ground-work of it immediately on the fall of our first parents, the consequences of which we all feel, in the gracious intimation given them, that *the seed of the woman†* should destroy the serpent's power : and afterwards made valuable additions to it of *precious promises‡* from time to time. When idolatry and vice had overspread the rest of the world ; he preserved it with peculiar care in one nation, *as a light shining in a dark place§*, for the benefit of all, who would turn their eyes towards it : and, by a chain of wonderful providences, brought on the proper season for diffusing it throughout the earth. Then he divested himself of *the glory, which he had with the Father before the world was||* : *the Word became flesh, and dwelt amongst us¶* : taught men in person the great truths of religion, confirmed them by beneficent miracles performed, and illustrious prophecies fulfilled ; exemplified them, 'as I have said, in his practice ; and provided the means of their descending uncorrupted to all future ages, and being efficaciously applied to the conviction of the wicked, and the comfort of the good. So fully is he, and he could not be more fully, what the Apostle calls him : who next reminds us, that in carrying on

* John i. 1.

† Gen. iii. 15.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 4.

§ Verse 19.

|| John xvii. 5.

¶ John i. 14.

this inconceivably kind work, he willingly underwent all manner of ill usage, and at length *endured* the pain, and *despised the shame, of the cross*, inflicted on him by wretches, for whom his precepts were too holy, and his life too harmless ; that so he might demonstrate his sincerity, and set a pattern of doing the hardest things, which he taught. Nay, he submitted farther, to become the representative of transgressors ; to be forsaken of God, and have his soul made sorrowful unto death, in that mysterious dispensation of laying on him the iniquities of us all : in order to give the most tremendous proof of the heinousness of sin ; that such a one as he should suffer so much, to induce the just and wise, though equally merciful, ruler of all to forgive it, and engage and enable the guilty to forsake it.

These things he did, the text goes on to say, *for the joy that was set before him* : the joy of illustrating at once the holiness and goodness of God, who appointed and accepted this method of our salvation : the joy of reforming and making happy, in themselves and one another, in time and to eternity, all those multitudes, who in every generation should embrace his offers ; and lastly the joy of being deservedly honoured, as the blessed instrument of these inestimable benefits.

Accordingly he hath the honour, as the Apostle proceeds to observe, of sitting down at the right hand of the throne of God : being placed in respect of that nature which he condescended to assume, and the sufferings of which are thus properly rewarded, in a state of supreme felicity, at the head of the whole creation, *angels and authorities being made subject unto him**. And in this exalted station he shall remain, superintending the affairs of the universe, till he returns to

* 1 Pet. iii. 22.

our earth at the Day of Judgment. Then *every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him**, they which blaspheme him, and they which professing, yet obey not his Gospel: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe†.

This then is he, to whom we are directed to look: to look off, for so the word signifies, from other objects, unsafe or unworthy, and contemplate him: not only as the most excellent of men, but a Being raised far above every name that is named, either in this world or that which is to come‡: nor only as thus eminent in himself, but as our greatest Benefactor and truest Friend; our wise Lawgiver and spotless Example; the Sacrifice by whose blood we are washed from our sins; the Head of the body of which we are members; the Judge, on whose sentence our everlasting state depends: our Prophet, our Priest and our King; our Saviour, *our Lord and our God*§.

Surely of such a one it seems impossible to think lowly; and almost unavoidable to think often and much. Yet were we to examine ourselves, how frequently or how seldom we recollect his perfections, and our most interesting relations to him; whether we are strongly or slightly affected by them; whether we principally attend to his rules of life, or those which are suggested by inconsiderate custom, vicious inclination, or vain self-opinion, falsely called reason; whether, even if we mean to do well, we pray with humility for his grace, or trust our own imagined strength; and lastly, whether after *doing all* we can, we rely on his merits, as *unprofitable servants*||, or

* Rev. i. 7.

† 2 Thess. 1. 8, 9, 10.

‡ Eph. i. 21.

§ John xx. 28.

|| Luke xvii. 10.

hope for salvation by our own sinful good deeds; what answer must the consciences of many of us make? Such undoubtedly as will at least evidence the need of fixing our thoughts upon him much more steadily, than we have done; of stirring up in our hearts the warmest sentiments of reverence, gratitude and love towards him; (for who can be equally intitled to them, or what employment so delightful or beneficial?) and of exerting them in every act, which he hath appointed, or his followers found serviceable. External acts of themselves indeed are nothing: but when they proceed from a good principle within, and are chosen and used with discretion, they keep up the vigour of the mind, and strengthen good habits inexpressibly. The importance of them in civil affairs is every where acknowledged: and how can we fancy it to be less in religious? Therefore if indeed we honour our Redeemer, we must show that we honour his Sacraments, his ordinances, the weekly, the yearly days consecrated to him, the places of his worship: permit me to add, his ministers, only being careful to distinguish, for the sake of our Master and of mankind, the devout, the laborious, the disinterested, from the lovers of pleasure or gain, of power or applause, from the formal, the thoughtless, the lukewarm.

Nor will he, whose respect to *the Author and Finisher of our faith* is real, either seek or wish to shelter himself from infidel scorn by leaving the motives of his conduct in religious matters doubtful: but openly, though decently, make it known to all men, of which side he in truth is; and do at least as much for the cause of God, as he could with propriety for any other, that he hath at heart: recollecting that thus the pious will be animated, the opposers staggered, the indolent awakened; and likewise, that them only

who confess him before men, will Jesus confess before his Father which is in Heaven *.

But zeal for his mission and doctrines will be of no avail, without imitation of his example and obedience to his laws. As on the one hand, the virtue which men profess without religion, the religion which they profess without Christianity, the Christianity which they profess without affection to Christ, is essentially imperfect and mostly nominal: they model it into what they please, and it wastes away to nothing: so on the other, not only hypocritical, but partial, attachment to him, fondness for him as the obtainer of pardon and future happiness, and slight of him as the director of life; hoping to be saved by faith without works, or waiting for his grace to amend us without taking pains to amend ourselves; these things *put his Gospel and him to open shame* †. We must *look unto Jesus*, as our exemplar and legislator: else we shall look to him in vain as our Saviour.

Some of his actions indeed were appropriated to his office; and some of his precepts to that of his Apostles. But whatever was temporary or singular in either, is easily discerned, and the rest binds us all. Therefore we must *learn of him to be meek and lowly: for so shall we find rest for our souls* ‡. We must condescend, when occasion requires, to the meanest instances of mutual service: for *our Master and Lord washed his disciples' feet, that they should do as he had done to them* §. We must take the most injurious provocations patiently: for he, *when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously* ||. We must *forgive one another, as God for Christ's sake is*

* Matth. x. 32.

† Heb. vi. 6.

‡ Matth. xi. 29.

§ John xiii. 5. 13. 15. || 1 Pet. ii. 23.

ready to *forgive us**. We must *speak the truth every man with his neighbour*†, for there was no guile found in his mouth‡. We must be *harmless and undefiled, separate from sinners*§, in our temper and practice, even when obliged to be most in their company; for so was he, conversing with them, as a physician with the sick. In a word, *the same mind must be in us, which was in Christ Jesus*|| our Lord.

And we must not only avoid gross transgressions and omissions; but *purify ourselves as he is pure*¶, and *perfect holiness in the fear of God*** . Ambition, worldliness, delicacy, voluptuousness, dissipation, eagerness for amusements and trifles, are utterly beneath us, and unsuitable to our profession. A Christian is a character of dignity: and though he submits with a graceful willingness to whatever his condition here demands: yet he *sets his affection only on the things above*††; and from the view of his Redeemer placed there at the right hand of God, draws his directions for his conduct below: reasoning with St. Paul, *The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again*‡‡.

Such as are duly moved by this consideration will faithfully perform, not only the general duties of life, but the particular ones of their rank and circumstances. Persons in authority will reflect, that he who is *Lord of lords*§§, and *the Prince of the kings of the earth*|||, hath deputed them for a work, similar to

* Eph. iv. 32. † Eph. iv. 25. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 22. § Heb. vii. 26.

|| Phil. ii. 5. ¶ 1 John iii. 3. ** 2 Cor. vii. 1. †† Col. iii. 2.

‡‡ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. §§ Rev. xvii. 14. ||| Rev. i. 5.

his own final one, *the punishment of evil-doers, and the praise of them that do well* * ; and consequently will inform themselves concerning both. *He needed not*, when upon earth, *that any should testify of man* ; for *he knew what was in man* † . But sagacious inquiry and strict observation are necessary for their executing that noble plan, which David hath laid down for them in the 101st Psalm. Happy the nation, where it is pursued with gentleness and candor, yet with spirit and efficacy, that the ill-inclined *may hear and fear, and do no more presumptuously*. ‡

Again : the ministers of the Gospel, if they look unto and *love the Lord Jesus in sincerity* § , will imitate his assiduity in giving instruction, his compassion to penitents, his plain denunciations against obstinate sinners, his contempt of unjust reproach, yet his caution to guard against needless offence : will accommodate their discourses, as he did, to the wants, the dispositions, the capacities of their hearers ; *condescending in this and all things to men of low estate* ¶ : will remember, that *his kingdom is not of this world* ¶ , and use whatever advantages they enjoy in it, to the purposes of the next : be in every good sense, as he was, but in no bad one, *the friends of Publicans and Sinners* ** ; neither act as being lords over God's heritage, but ensamples to the flock, that when the chief Shepherd shall appear, they may receive a crown of glory † † . Wherefore holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High-Priest of our profession ‡ ‡ .

* 1 Pet. ii. 14.

† John ii. 25.

‡ Deut. xvii. 13.

§ Eph. vi. 24.

¶ Rom. xii. 16.

¶ John xviii. 36.

** Matth. xi. 19.

† † 1 Pet. v. 3. 4.

‡ ‡ Heb. iii. 1.

Further yet : those who have large incomes, if they fix their thoughts on him, *who for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might become rich* * *in good works* † and heavenly treasures, will be powerfully excited not to place their happiness, either in the acquisition or possession of wealth, or the enjoyment of any of those pleasures which wealth can help to procure : but in doing good, as the blessed Jesus did, and benefiting their *brethren for whom he died* ‡. To do this more effectually, they will set an example of prudent self-constraint and frugality, which may preserve multitudes of others, if not themselves, from follies and distresses : they will employ what is thus saved in acts of judicious charity ; and have constantly in their minds what many, who are extremely liberal, strangely forget, that all expences, and seeming bounties, which tend to corrupt morals, are mischievous ; and using methods to make men pious and virtuous, providing for their souls at the same time with their bodies, which our Saviour did continually, conduces beyond all things even to their present welfare.

Lastly, they who are afflicted, (and who is not often so in one respect or another ?) if they dwell, as the text was meant to advise them particularly, on the contemplation of our compassionate High-Priest, *the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief* §, will learn from him to endure *all the contradiction of sinners*, and *all the heavy yoke* that is laid on the sons of Adam ||, disesteem, ingratitude, perverseness, insolence, disappointment, poverty, pain and death, without being *weary or faint in their minds* ¶. He, though faultless, endured much more than we sinners shall be

* 2 Cor. viii. 9.

† 1 Tim. vi. 18.

‡ Rom. xiv. 10. 15.

§ Is. liii. 3.

|| Ecclus. xl. 1.

¶ Heb. xii. 3.

called to: under every trial *his grace will be sufficient for us**: if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him†; the more we undergo, the greater will be our reward: and what have we then to resent or fear or be dejected about, or whom to envy? Miserable comforts are all the worldly means, by which men labour in vain to deceive themselves, and mitigate their wretchedness, compared with the *everlasting consolation and good hope, which our Lord Jesus Christ hath given us*‡, whose words are, *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne*§.

Let every one therefore of every degree *fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life, whereunto he is called*||: for these are not cunningly devised fables¶, but *the true sayings of God***.

They who have hitherto lived in sin, (and so far we all have, that *by his obedience to the law no man is justified in the sight of God*††) let them *flee to the merciful Jesus from the wrath to come*‡‡, *acquaint themselves with him, and be at peace*§§. They that once had a sense of religion, but *have left their first love*|||, drawn away by vicious indulgences, or temporal interests, or *the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge*¶¶, let them remember from whence they are fallen, and repent and do their *first works****. They who have hitherto persevered in piety, let them form in themselves, as they will always have room and need, a still completer image of Christ.

* 2 Cor. xii. 9. † 2 Tim. ii. 12. ‡ 2 Thess. ii. 16. § Rev. iii. 21

|| 1 Tim vi. 12.

¶ 2 Pet. i. 16.

** Rev. 19. 9.

†† Gal. ii. 16. iii. 11.

‡‡ Matth. iii. 7.

§§ Job xxii. 21.

||| Rev. ii. 4.

¶¶ Prov. xix. 27.

*** Rev. ii. 5.

And let us all incessantly study to acquire that constant, that affectionate and influencing attention to him, for which St. Peter celebrates the early Christians, when he saith, *Whom having not seen, ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.**

* 1 Pet. i. 8, 9.

S E R M O N VII.

1 COR. i. 22, 23, 24.

FOR THE JEWS REQUIRE A SIGN, AND THE GREEKS SEEK
AFTER WISDOM ;

BUT WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED : UNTO THE JEWS
A STUMBLING-BLOCK, AND UNTO THE GREEKS FOOL-
ISHNESS ;

BUT UNTO THEM WHICH ARE CALLED, BOTH JEWS AND
GREEKS, CHRIST, THE POWER OF GOD, AND THE
WISDOM OF GOD.

TO expect eternal life through a Saviour who died
for us, is the fundamental doctrine of the Christian
profession : the article that distinguishes our faith from
all others, and with which our religion stands or falls.
The New Testament therefore dwells much on the im-
portance of this belief : and especially the Epistles of
St. Paul inculcate it every where. He *determined*,
though a man of extensive knowledge, *not to know*
any thing among those whom he instructed, to insist
on no subject, comparatively speaking, *save Christ*
*Jesus, and him crucified.** Still both he, and the rest
of the Apostles, must plainly foresee, and they quickly
experienced, as the preachers of the Gospel have done
ever since, that the prejudices of many, and the pride
of all men, would find much difficulty in submitting to
owe their salvation to another ; especially to one, who
had lived so poor a life, and suffered so disgraceful a

* 1 Cor. ii. 2.

death ; which would all be avoided by teaching them to ascribe the whole merit of it to themselves. But *they had not so learned Christ,* as to handle the word of God deceitfully.†* They knew, that what seemed to human vanity weak and ill-judged, was the true and only way to heavenly happiness. And therefore, though *the Jews required a sign, &c.*

In discoursing on these words, I shall endeavour to shew,

I. What it is to *preach Christ crucified.*

II. Whence it came to pass, that this was *to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.*

III. That, notwithstanding, it places in a strong light both *the power and the wisdom of God.*

I. What it is to *preach Christ crucified.* Now this, in one word, is to lay before men the nature and terms of that *eternal salvation*, of which, by his suffering on the cross, he is *become the author unto all that obey him.‡* More particularly it is to instruct them in the following great truths : that there ever hath, doth, and will exist, one infinite Being, perfectly wise, just and good, the Almighty Maker and Ruler of the universe ; who created man for the practice of piety and virtue, and for the enjoyment of everlasting life : that our first parents, by wilfully transgressing a most equitable command of his, forfeited their title to immortality, disordered the frame of their bodies and minds, and derived to us the same corrupt and mortal nature, to which they had reduced themselves : that being in this condition through their fault, all men sunk into a still worse, by committing many sins, which, however prone to them, they might have had the means of avoiding ; and thus have deserved pu-

* Eph. iv. 20. † 2 Cor. iv. 2. ‡ Heb. v. 9.

nishment here and hereafter : . that, wickedness prevailing early, and spreading wide in the world, first the practice, then the knowledge, both of true religion and moral virtue, were in a great measure lost out of it : but that the unspeakable mercy and wisdom of the supreme Being provided a remedy for these evils, intimated in general terms to the earliest offenders, promised more distinctly in the succeeding ages, and actually given *when the proper fullness of time came* ;* which remedy was this. A person, made known under the character of the only-begotten Son of God, and one with the Father in a manner to us incomprehensible, after teaching mankind from the beginning by various other methods, took upon him our nature, was born of a virgin, and dwelt on earth, to teach us personally by his word and example : condescended, for this compassionate purpose, to all the inconveniences of the present state of things, to numberless indignities and sufferings, and lastly to have his life taken away by the hands of wicked men ; *humbling himself unto death, even the death of the cross*,† usually inflicted on none but the vilest and lowest of malefactors. In consideration of this meritorious goodness of his, which he engaged, before the world began, thus to manifest, the Most High established with him a covenant of grace and favour, by which *all power in heaven and earth was given him* ;‡ and provision was made, that whoever should sincerely repent of the sins which he had committed, and throw himself on the promised mercy of God ; whether as more obscurely notified before the Redeemer's incarnation, or more clearly afterwards ; taking the word of truth for the law of his life, and faithfully endeavouring to obey it, should not only have pardon for his past transgres-

* Gal. iv. 4.

† Phil. ii. 8.

‡ Matth. xxxviii. 18.

sions, however heinous, but the assistance of the divine Spirit to preserve him from future ones : that a kind Providence should turn every thing to his good, which befel him in this world, and endless felicity be his portion in the next. But then it was also denounced, that whoever should either slight these offers when duly made ; or professing to accept them, live unsuitably to them, Christ should be of no benefit to such ; they should remain in their sins, with this heavy aggravation of their guilt, that they had rejected the counsel of God for their salvation ; and when *light was come into the world, loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**

This is, in brief, the doctrine of Christ crucified. The main parts of it, you see, are two : God's goodness to us, and our duty to him : and if either be omitted, men are not *taught as the truth is in Jesus.*† Insisting on moral duties only, is overlooking the greatest of all duties, piety. Insisting on the duties of natural religion only, is injuriously despising those of revelation, which the same authority hath enjoined. And laying before men all the commandments of God, only omitting to say, how they shall be enabled to perform them, and how they shall procure their performances, faulty as the best of them are, to be accepted, is failing them in points of the most absolute necessity.

But then on the other hand, speaking of nothing, but Christ and his grace, is concealing what *the grace of God appeared unto all men to teach them : that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.*‡ It is not therefore naming Christ ever so often, or exalting his compassion to the fallen race of Adam ever

* John iii. 19.

† Eph. iv. 21.

‡ Tit. ii. 11, 12.

so much, or describing his dreadful sufferings ever so movingly, that is preaching him as we ought, if all be not directed to make us become like him. His own Sermon on the Mount is almost entirely filled with precepts of duty ; of the common duties of common life. And so may other sermons too, yet be truly Christian, even without mentioning Christ expressly, provided the necessity of his aid and his merits be understood throughout them ; and the great design of his coming, the reformation of the hearts and lives of men, be closely pursued in them. Thus then judge of our discourses : and, which is of more importance, thus judge of your own improvement. It is neither talking nor thinking highly of Christ, nor being affected in the tenderest manner with his bitter passion and dying love, that constitutes a believer in him, such as he will finally own : but *herein may we have boldness in the day of judgment, if, as he was, so are we in this world.**

Yet still the sacrifice of him, *as a lamb without blemish,†* for our sins, the need we had of it, and the benefits we receive from it, are such capital and indispensable articles, that every preacher, who doth not frequently return to them, is without excuse : and every professor of Christianity, who doth not *live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved him, and gave himself for him, frustrates his grace,‡* and will come short of his glory.§ Accordingly, though St. Paul himself hath considerable parts of chapters, in which little, if any thing, is said of our Saviour ; yet all prepares the way for introducing him again ; all points our eye to him ; all makes part of that building, *the corner stone of which is Jesus Christ.||*

* 1 John iv. 17.

† 1 Pet. i. 19.

‡ Gal. ii. 20, 21.

§ Rom. iii. 23.

|| Eph. ii. 20.

Having thus explained, what *preaching Christ crucified* is, I proceed to shew,

II. Why this doctrine was *to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*: which the words of the text, when unfolded, will tell us plainly. *The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.*

The former had been delivered from the bondage of *Egypt by signs and wonders, by a mighty hand and a stretched out arm.** A glorious appearance of God upon Mount Sinai had accompanied the promulgation of their law: his visible presence had dwelt with them, first in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple: his miraculous interpositions had given, preserved, and restored to them the land of Canaan, with much earthly prosperity. These blessings had so powerfully struck the imaginations of a gross and carnal people, that they paid in general but little attention to any that were not of a temporal nature. And therefore whenever their prophets foretold the coming of the promised Redeemer, they were obliged, unless they would have their predictions despised and forgotten, to describe him in terms, literally denoting worldly grandeur: as *ruling in the midst of his enemies, judging among the heathen,†* and *higher than the kings of the earth.‡* They did however join to these descriptions such circumstances, as sufficiently determined their words to a spiritual meaning. But still the other, being far more agreeable, was always uppermost in the thoughts of the Jews: and they would image to themselves the expected Son of David, as a mighty conqueror, who should prove himself the true Messiah by supernatural assistances from above, enabling him to exert a more than human force against the nations, which held them

* Deut. iv. 34. v. 15. † Ps. cx. 2, 6. ‡ Ps. lxxxix. 27, 28.

in subjection, and extend the Jewish empire over the globe.

In this sense it was, that they *required a sign*.^{*} Other signs of his mission our Saviour had shewn without number : but still they demand to *see a sign from heaven*.[†] Every miracle is a sign from heaven, had they considered rightly. But the sign, on which their hearts were set, was that in the book of Daniel : when the *Son of Man should come with the clouds of heaven, and be brought near to the ancient of days ; and have given to him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages should serve him*.[‡] Our Saviour observed their mistake, and told them, that the sign, which they desired, should indeed be *given*, but *not to that generation* : that the principal evidence to be afforded them, was *the sign of the Prophet Jonas* :§ the resurrection of Jesus the third day from the grave, as Jonas rose from the depth of the sea. To following ages farther signs were to be vouchsafed in their order : the dominion, which they expected to see established at once, was designed to take place by degrees, over the souls and consciences of men, not their bodies and fortunes merely : and in this noblest sense, *the kingdoms of this world were to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ*.|| But at length the time will come for a yet more awful display of his regal power, in the last judgment : and then shall they, who were so prematurely impatient for a sign from heaven, *see*, before they wish it, *the*

* And a sign of this sort they expected, even when the Temple was burnt by the Romans. For that very day a false Prophet assured the people, *ὡς ὁ Θεὸς ἐπὶ τὸ ἱερόν ἀναβῆναι κελεύει, δεξομένους τὰ σέμεια τῆς σωτηρίας*. Joseph. B. I. l. 6. c. 5. §. 2. Ed. Haverc. In a few lines after, he stiles this, *προσμένειν τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ βοήθειαν*.

† Matth. xvi. 1. Mark viii. 11. Luke xi. 16.

‡ Dan. vii. 13, 14.

§ Matth. xii. 39.

|| Rev. xi. 15.

*sign of the Son of Man coming in the clouds, with power and great glory.**

But such representations were likely to have little effect on such minds. One, who should *at that time restore again the kingdom to Israel*,† was what the whole people wanted. And when they not only beheld the meanness of our Saviour's appearance, and heard the meekness of his doctrine, but saw how carefully he avoided the opportunities of obtaining an earthly kingdom, the leading part of the nation immediately denied him. But when he was arraigned and condemned, and suffered the death of a slave; then the faith, even of his Apostles, almost died with him. *We trusted*, say two of his disciples, as if now all hope was at an end, *we trusted, that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.*‡ It is true, they recovered themselves: but the greater part of the Jews did not: and a crucified Redeemer continues *a stumbling-block* to them; or, in the words of Simeon, *a sign spoken against, set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel*:§ indeed for the utter fall of that church and nation, till the season foretold shall come, for which Providence hath left room, by the wonderful preservation of this one and only people distinct from all others for so many ages, when by *looking on him whom they have pierced, and mourning*,|| they shall rise again, and be as *life from the dead.*¶

As for the Greeks, or Gentiles, they did not object to the Gospel, that the authority of it wanted the proof of signs from heaven; but that the preaching of it wanted the recommendation of what they called *wisdom*. Neither the manner of the Apostles teaching was adorned with that plausible oratory, of which they were so

* Matth. xxiv. 30.

† Acts i. 6.

‡ Luke xxiv. 21.

§ Luke ii. 34.

|| Zech. xii. 10. John xix. 37.

¶ Rom. xi. 15.

fond ; which soothed the ears, and entertained the imagination ; which could make a bad cause victorious, and a good one suspected : nor yet was the matter of their discourse made up of curious speculations, abstruse points in philosophy debated with acuteness, theories, built upon slender foundations to great heights, then attacked with subtle objections, and defended with more subtle refinements. These were the delights of the learned Greeks : who, as St. Paul and indeed their own writers observe particularly of *the Athenians*, *spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.** Immediately therefore when he had begun to preach in that city, they apply to him with great eagerness : *May we know, what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is ?†* But when they found no such gratification of their fancy as they expected ; but a grave reproof of their favourite superstitions, a serious call to repentance, a solemn denunciation of a future recompence ; and the foundation of these disagreeable doctrines laid in a mere fact, which was contrary to all their schemes and systems, that *God would judge the world in righteousness by that man, whom he had ordained, whereof he had given assurance to all men, in that he had raised him from the dead : some, we read, mocked ;* and of those, who said more civilly, that *they would hear him again of that matter,‡* we have no cause to believe, that many did. Nor would the principal Romans afford to our holy faith more attention. For when St. Paul was arguing before Agrippa, being a Jew, from the Prophets, that *Christ was to suffer and rise again ;* Festus, the governor, instantly interrupted him : *Paul, thou art beside thyself ; much learning doth make thee mad.§*

* Acts xvii. 21.

† Verse 19.

‡ Acts xvii. 31, 32.

§ Acts xxvi. 23, 24.

This was the treatment, which men, *wise in their own conceits*,* and bigotted to their own opinions, gave the Gospel of Christ. Its doctrines had nothing amusing to minds full of trifling curiosity: its precepts had many things disgusting to human sensuality and pride: its proofs were inconsistent with their prevailing notions. So it was rejected without examination by persons, whom the irony of Job suits perfectly well: *no doubt, but ye are the people: and wisdom shall die with you.*† It ought to surprize no one, that this sort of men, who have always been too common in the world, and never more than now, should scorn Christianity: while they continue such as they are, they cannot embrace it.

But, God be thanked, there have ever been some of more equitable dispositions: and to these it hath constantly appeared in that light, which the text expresses,

III. *But unto them, which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* They who would suffer the voice of reason and revelation to call upon them, and would attend to the call, quickly discovered, under the meanness of Christ's appearance, divine power; and under the plainness of his doctrine, divine wisdom.

The Jews had no cause to expect military exploits, miraculous victories, and outward splendor in their Messiah. Their own Prophets had foretold, that he was to *come to them lowly and meek*;‡ *to be despised and rejected of men, to pour out his soul unto death an offering for sin, and make intercession for the transgressors.*§ Of other sorts of miracles they had many more, performed by him and his disciples, than by Moses and the Prophets. If his death, for want of

* Rom. xii. 16.

† Job xii. 2.

‡ Zech. ix. 9. Matth. xxi. 5.

§ Is. liii.

knowing the Scriptures, appeared an objection ; his rising again, and ascension into heaven, was a full proof of his authority. If he brought them no deliverance from their temporal enemies ; yet he freed them from infinitely more formidable ones, from sin and guilt and the wrath of God : and instead of a short-lived tyranny over the nations of the earth, he obtained for them an eternal triumph over death and hell ; and *made them kings and priests unto God, to reign with him for ever and ever.** Thus was he, in much the most important sense, *the power of God unto salvation :†* and his real greatness exceeded all that they looked for, unspeakably more, than his visible appearance fell beneath it.

As to the defect of that wisdom, which the Greeks required in the Gospel : it had not indeed *the wisdom of this world*, or of the vain *disputers of this world,‡* who *professing themselves to be wise became fools :§* but, void as it appears of argumentation and ornament, every single truth, that can lead men to virtue and happiness, is taught in it much more fully and convincingly, than in all the preceding institutions either of philosophy or religion. The being, attributes and providence of God, the Apostles proved, were *clearly seen, being understood by the things that were made :||* the nature and obligation of piety and morals, the forgiveness of sins upon repentance, the inward assistance of divine grace, the future happiness of the good, and punishment of the bad, these things they did not ingeniously harangue upon, after the beloved manner of the Greeks, and leave them in the same uncertainty in which they found them, but gave for their assertions concerning them, the irrefragable

* Rev. i. 6. v. 10. xx. 6. xxii. 5. † Rom. i. 16. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 20.
§ Rom. i. 22. || Rom. i. 20.

testimony of miracles which must proceed from the Almighty ; and some of them such as, in their opinion, even the Almighty was unable to perform. For that God himself *should raise the dead, was thought a thing incredible with them.** But as no just reasoning can shew it to be impossible, it is more certainly his work for being beyond our comprehension. And this is that undeniable *demonstration of the Spirit and of power*, which infinitely excels all *the enticing words of man's wisdom*,† not only in the strength of its evidence, but the efficacy of its influence too. For after the deepest philosophers, and most florid orators had wearied themselves for ages in framing elaborate discourses about religion and virtue, without being able to set up the true profession of either, so much as in a single village ; the unlearned disciples of Christ laid, in a few years, such foundations of both throughout the world, as have supported them to this day, and ever will. *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.‡*

Since therefore the whole of the Gospel is so firmly proved, and most parts of it so evidently rational, and no part of it evidently otherwise ; be we ever so incapable of penetrating into the depths of some doctrines, and the reasons of some proceedings, yet well may it become us to think, that he, who sees all things, may easily see many, which we do not ; and to reverence *the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which he ordained before the world, unto our glory.§* Whether sinners could be saved no other way, than by the death of his Son ; or why, if they could, he hath preferred that to the rest ; we have no

* Acts xxvi. 8. † 1 Cor. ii. 4. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 25. § 1 Cor. ii. 7.

right to ask. What he hath chosen, we might be sure is best, even did no reason at all for it appear. But he hath made known several to us: some clearly, some *as through a glass darkly* ;* but the obscurest of them all to be contemplated with awful respect.

By his eternal Son, God made the world, and hath administered it from the beginning. He therefore was plainly the fit person to conduct the most important of all its affairs, the recovery of mankind from sin and misery ; *that in all things, as the Apostle expresses it, he might have the pre-eminence, and in him all fullness dwell.*† In order to recover and reform men, he must instruct them : and doing it himself was unquestionably the most efficacious method. But how must he come to do it? Had he appeared in a station of power and wealth ; many would have been ready to pay court to him : but few, to obey his precepts from the heart. Even in his low estate, some followed him a while, merely for the loaves. And how much more hypocrisy, a very improper qualification for the kingdom of righteousness, would there have been amongst his hearers, had the circumstances of the teacher been more inviting ! And how unsurmountable a disgrace might they have brought upon his whole undertaking in its very infancy, instead of the honour and support which it received from the unimpeached integrity of its first afflicted professors !

But further : Nothing enforces precepts, like example. Now what example could the Messiah have set, in the midst of worldly pomp and grandeur ? A very useful one certainly in some points to some of his chief officers, and others about his person : but removed from the sight, and unsuitable to the condition of the

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

† See Col. i. 13—20.

bulk of mankind: whereas in the sort of life, which he chose, an extremely public, though a mean one, he was a daily and familiar pattern to all men, of the most general and difficult virtues: of condescension, disinterestedness, and delight to do good; of indifference to worldly enjoyments, composedness under contempt, meekness under malicious provocations, and resignation to God's will under the bitterest sufferings of every kind. These things, most of us, in one part or another of our pilgrimage, have need to practise: and we find them so hard to learn, that the encouragement of his having done and borne much more than he requires of us, and the assurance, that *having been tempted himself, he will succour us when we are tempted*,* will, in a time of trial, be blessings unspeakable.

Then consider besides, how great a confirmation his humility and patience add to the other proofs of his authority. A claim to worldly power, by virtue of a divine commission, raises apprehensions of unfair design. But when a person, declaring himself to come from heaven, renounces every thing on earth, which men usually hold dear; when he shews by plain facts, that his errand is, *not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to lay down his life for his followers*;† when he foresees and foretells, that his doctrine will bring him to the shamefullest and cruellest of deaths, and yet goes on, and meets it calmly: here is the strongest evidence of sincerity; and the most engaging motive to love him, who hath so loved us, as to seal with his blood the truth of the good tidings, which he came to bring us.

But there is yet one reason more of our Saviour's passion, of which if we see not distinctly the full force,

* Heb. ii. 18.

† Matth. xx. 28.

we see however, that it may be of infinite force. Mankind are sinners. Our first parents were so : we have all been so, few of us think to what a degree : and close upon sin follow weakness and guilt. The good instructions and example of our blessed Lord have, indeed, without any thing farther, a powerful tendency to reform us, if we have strength to reform ourselves, on seeing that we ought. But what can they do for us, if we have not ; which experience too often proves to be our case ? or supposing them to do it ever so effectually, still it would be true, that we have been sinners ; have dishonoured our Maker, and broken his laws : and who but himself can tell, what satisfaction the holiness of his nature and the honour of his government may demand to be made for such offences ? Mere sorrow for having done amiss very seldom frees us in this world from the ill consequences of transgression : and what security can we have, that it will in the next ? Living well for the future, is making no amends for having sinned before : for it is no more than our duty, if we had never sinned at all : besides that what men call living well, especially men destitute of the spirit of Christ, is mixed with innumerable and grievous faults. In this state of things then, where is the certainty, that our sins would or could be forgiven ; or the authority of God kept up in the eyes of his creation otherwise, than by punishing the guilty ? And if that was to be done, the whole race of mankind must fall under the sentence. Here it was therefore that his unsearchable wisdom interposed, who, alone knowing the fittest means of reconciling justice with goodness, pitched upon this : that, as a terrifying monument of the ill desert of iniquity, his beloved Son should in our nature, and in our stead, suffer death ;

and for an eternal demonstration of the divine benig-
 nity, his undergoing it voluntarily should be rewarded
 with the highest glory to himself ; and with pardon,
 and grace, and life eternal to all who made their hum-
 ble claim to them, by repentance, faith, and love.
 Thus did God shew himself *just, and the justifier of*
*them which believe in Jesus :** thus did *mercy and*
truth meet together ; righteousness and peace kiss
each other.†

Assuredly so extraordinary a method would never
 have been taken without extraordinary need of it.
 That we should fully discern the need, is no way ne-
 cessary : it suffices that God did. Our concern is no
 more, than to accept salvation, his own gift, on his
 own terms : renouncing all merit in ourselves, laying
 hold, by a lively faith, on the merits of our Redeemer's
 obedience, thanking our heavenly Father from the bot-
 tom of our souls, for sending his blessed Son into the
 world, and esteeming most highly the Christian creed,
 the Christian worship, the Christian Sacraments. *God*
forbid then, that we should glory in any thing, save
in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ :‡ or ever be
 ashamed of that, for all the scorn and ridicule of a
 thoughtless and profane world. But God forbid also,
 that while we profess to believe on him, we should
crucify him to ourselves afresh, and put him and his
religion to shame,§ by transgressing and neglecting
 any obligation of piety towards our Maker, our Sa-
 viour, our Sanctifier ; of justice or goodness towards
 our fellow-creatures ; of humility, sobriety, tempe-
 rance, chastity, in the government of ourselves. For
 in vain do we *call him Lord*, unless we *do the things||*

* Rom. iii. 26.

† Psal. lxxxv. 10.

‡ Gal. vi. 14.

§ Heb. vi. 6.

|| Luke vi. 46.

which he commands us : in vain do we trust in his sacrifice, unless we *present our souls and bodies, a sacrifice acceptable unto God* :* in vain do we imagine our peace is made through him in heaven, unless on earth we *follow peace with all men, and that universal holiness of life, without which no man shall see the Lord*.†

* Rom. xii. 1.

† Heb. xii. 14.

S E R M O N VIII.

1 COR. xv. 19.

IF IN THIS LIFE ONLY WE HAVE HOPE IN CHRIST, WE
ARE OF ALL MEN MOST MISERABLE.

IN the words preceding these, the Apostle, after setting forth in several particulars, the evidence of our blessed Lord's resurrection, goes on to prove from it the important doctrine of a general resurrection to eternal life.

It may seem to us now very strange, that any, who called themselves Christians, could make the least doubt of so known and essential an article of the Christian faith. But if we consider the state, in which the world was then, we shall wonder no longer, that, of professed believers, there should be some, who did not believe the dead would be raised again. Among the Jews, the Pharisees indeed were firmly persuaded of this truth. But the Sadducees, a considerable sect, though not for the numbers, yet for the rank of those who embraced it, rejected the doctrine of a future life intirely; and looked on the resurrection, as a thing peculiarly incredible. Notwithstanding which, as they held a present providence that rules the world, they might many of them, reading the predictions of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, seeing the accomplishment of them in the person of Jesus, and struck with the miracles, which

he and his followers performed, be persuaded, on the whole, that he was sent from God ; and yet be very backward to understand what he taught, when it contradicted their former prejudices. But the heathens were still more likely to act thus. For amongst them, even the steadiest believers of a future state all disbelieved the raising again of the body, as a thing both impossible and unfit : for their men of learning thought it only the prison of the soul ; which must always be an impediment instead of a help to it. Suppose then Christianity preached, with proper evidence, to such persons as these : they would receive very gladly what was said of the remission of sins, the obligations to virtue, the future life of the soul, happy or miserable, according to every one's deeds. But when the resurrection of the body was taught, there must evidently be great danger, either that they would reject the whole of the gospel, because of this one seemingly incredible part ; as the philosophers at Athens did, who are mentioned in the Acts ; or else, that they would so interpret this part, as to reconcile it with their pre-conceived opinion. Accordingly, the history of the Church informs us, that several, in the first ages thought our Saviour died and rose again, not in reality but in miraculous appearance only. And others had equally wild fancies in other articles of religion : as indeed it was very natural for them to entertain surprising imaginations, about matters so entirely new to them : especially when, in all likelihood, great numbers were converted to the belief of Christianity in general, by seeing or being informed of the miracles wrought in its favour ; who perhaps had no opportunity, for some time, of hearing the particular doctrines of it explained so distinctly, by those who thoroughly understood them, as to be set right in every point.

And this may possibly have been one chief reason of the many strange notions, that we find some of the early Christians embraced.

Besides, they might the more easily be mistaken, in the case before us, on this account: that the Apostles, imitating the language already in use concerning the Jewish proselytes, expressed the change, which Christianity made in the tempers and condition of men, by the phrases of *dying to sin, being buried with Christ in baptism, and rising again to newness of life*. The ignorant or prejudiced might hastily conclude from hence, that no other rising again was intended to be taught: and that therefore *the resurrection was past already*, as we are told by our Apostle, some affirmed.*

Now this error, if it comprehended the denial of a future state, subverted the main purpose of Christianity: which was, influencing the world to piety and virtue, from the expectation of that state†. And where only the future life of the body was denied; even that, by consequence, made the Gospel of *no effect*. For if the resurrection of it was a thing impossible, which all, who rejected it, seem to have held; then the resurrection of Christ was a thing impossible. Yet this was the main fact, to which the Apostles were appointed to bear witness, and lay the stress of their cause upon it. If therefore they erred here, they deserved belief in nothing: *their preaching was vain, and the faith of their followers vain also*‡. Or sup-

* 2 Tim. ii. 18.

† Origen, Com. in Matth. xxii. 23. tom. 17. p. 811. insists that the Apostle writes here against persons disbelieving a future life; and that his arguments are not conclusive against those, who disbelieve a resurrection only. I have endeavoured to shew the contrary in what follows.

‡ 1 Cor. xvi. 14.

posing Christianity had still sufficient evidence left; yet in another sense, it would be *vain*, that is ineffectual to the forgiveness of our sins; the very foundation of which is, that *he, who was delivered for our offences, rose again for our justification* *. If therefore he is not risen, we are not justified: it appears not, that his death was more than that of a common man; he continues under the power of it, not able to help himself, much less others; and human kind remains, as it was before, liable to future punishment, and uncertain of future reward. This is the Apostle's reasoning, just before the text: *If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins* †. He goes on: *Then they also, which are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished* ‡. Neither dying in the Christian faith, nor dying for it, can do them good with respect to a future life. And *if in this life only we have hope in Christ*, as very probably some of the Sadducee converts might think, *we are of all men most miserable*: or, as the original word strictly signifies, *most pitiable*.

Now, of what persons this is said, and on what account it is true of them, a great doubt hath been raised.

Some have gone so far, as to affirm, that, in the present world, brutes are happier than men, and bad men than good. But of the former of these points, at least, plainly, the Apostle saith nothing. Others understand him to mean, that the condition of moral heathens in this life is better than that of Christians, because of the difficult duties, and severe restraints, which are peculiar to the latter. But evidently he doth not say at all, what the condition of any persons actually is: but only what it would be, if they had not

* Rom. iv. 25. † 1 Cor. xv. 16, 17. ‡ Verse 18.

the hope of hereafter to support them. And therefore with that hope, good men, and good Christians, may, even at present, be happier than others: though it were true, that, without it, they would be more miserable. Not that he meant to affirm, that they would be more miserable, were the prospect of a better state out of the question. Far from it.

Read but the description, which he gives of the vicious part of the heathen world, in the beginning of his Epistle to the Romans: where he tells us, *God had given them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things, which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; without understanding, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.** Could he possibly think this a happy state? He appeals to their own experience for the contrary: *What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed †?* Heathen vices then he did not think at all conducive to the enjoyment of life: nor doth he ever intimate, that heathen virtues were more so, than Christian graces. So far as they are both the same, they must have the same effects: and there are few cases, if any in which the Gospel, rightly understood, is more strict than reason, duly cultivated: besides that those precepts of it, which are the strictest of all, perhaps contribute the most of all to our happiness here; by striking at the root, from whence our faults and uneasinesses spring, and requiring of us that inward self-government, which is the only means of true self-enjoyment. There is also another exceeding great advantage of Christian virtue; that the Gospel affords such peculiar evidences and means of God's grace and assistance,

* Rom. i. 28—31.

† Rom. vi. 21.

in proportion as we need it, to do every thing, to which he calls us ; that though we were not to add the consideration of his rewarding us hereafter, yet believers would undoubtedly be capable of going through the same difficulties with much greater spirit, comfort, and success, than other men. And accordingly our Saviour assures us, that *his yoke is easy and his burden light**. And St. Paul yet more distinctly asserts, that *godliness, meaning certainly Christian godliness, is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come*†.

But of whom can it be then, that he speaks, when he saith so expressly, *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*? I answer, of the very same, whom he denoted, by the word *We*, the last time he used it, but a few lines before : of the witnesses of Christ's resurrection, and the preachers of his Gospel ; who then suffered many afflictions on account of it in this life ; and were wretched indeed if they had no prospect of being the better for it in another : as were certainly in proportion also their first followers. For in that age, *all that lived godly in Christ Jesus suffered persecution*‡ ; and knew, as the Apostle reminds them, that *they were appointed thereunto*§.

Not those duties therefore, which always belonged to the Christian profession, but those sufferings, which then attended it, were the reason, that, had not the hopes of a better life through Christ supported them, they had been *the most miserable of all men*. And this appears more plainly yet from the sequel of the discourse ; where, resuming this part of the subject

* Matth. xi. 30.

† 1 Tim. iv. 8.

‡ 2 Tim. iii. 12.

§ Thess. iii. 3.

again, he doth not argue, *If the dead rise not*, why do we live soberly and righteously; as he doubtless ought to have done, if sobriety and righteousness were prejudicial in this world; but, *If the dead rise not, why stand we in jeopardy every hour**? *What advantageth it me, that I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, if the dead rise not †?*

He doth indeed after this, immediately subjoin, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die*. But these words, in the passage of Isaiah ‡, from whence they are taken, stand in opposition, not to temperance, but to mortification and fasting. And here they do not mean, let us indulge debauchery and excess: but let us not deprive ourselves, if we can hope for no future advantage from it, of the innocent satisfactions and comforts of life, while it lasts. The expression may indeed sometimes be used in a bad sense: but it is most frequently used in a good one; as to mention no more, where our Saviour saith of himself, that *he came eating and drinking §*; and where St. Paul pleads, *Have we not power to eat and to drink ||*? His intention therefore was only to say: If there be no resurrection, if Christ be not risen, if his religion can be of no service to us hereafter, let us not make ourselves miserable for the sake of it here: let us not spend our lives, as he elsewhere declares he did his, for the service of the Gospel, in *weariness and painfulness, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness ¶*; but renouncing what only brings on us fruitless sufferings, enjoy our ease like other wise men. These consequences he knew would startle those, whom he pressed with them; and shew them the necessity, either of abandoning their faith entirely, which

* 1 Cor. xv. 30.

† Verse 32.

‡ Is. xxii. 13.

§ Matth. xi. 19.

|| 1 Cor. ix. 4.

¶ 2 Cor. xi. 27.

he was certain they would not, or of admitting the resurrection for one article of it.

Upon the whole then it appears, that the persecutions, not the duties of Christianity, were what would have made the believers in it miserable, had the hope, which it gave them, been confined to this life. And indeed, though possibly God might have appointed, that doing our duty should be attended of necessity with greater uneasiness and less pleasure here, than transgressing it: yet such a constitution of things would have made his moral perfections, and his providence, much more doubtful; for present appearances would then have been altogether against them: and this would greatly have discouraged the practice of virtue; amongst all men indeed, but especially in those many ages and countries, which had no clear knowledge, whatever glimmerings they might have, of a future state.

It is true, some excellent persons have imagined, that the fewer advantages they allowed to virtue here in their pious discourses and writings, the more fully they should prove it must be rewarded hereafter: and therefore have strenuously pleaded for the present happiness of vice. But we ought not to state things otherwise than they are, in order to draw useful conclusions: and no good will come of it. Being persuaded, that wickedness is happier at present, may incline as many to think God is not displeased with it; as any reasonings from his attributes will incline to think he is. For, if the state of things be contrived by his providence to favour bad men more than good now: this may well raise a doubt, whether the same providence will so certainly do just the contrary in the next world. And a very small hope of escaping punishment there, will effectually determine men to live

as they ought not, if it be acknowledged their interest here. Or supposing it ever so plain, that if virtue, on the whole, suffer in this life, it must be rewarded in another; yet what we call virtue in ourselves will be far from intitling us to such reward. And supposing any creature faultlessly obedient, the justice of God will be bound to bestow on it no greater and no longer reward, than will barely make amends for its sufferings. And if we argue from his goodness; his doing ever so much for it on earth, will be no manner of objection against his doing still more in heaven. For that will be only carrying on a scheme, which he hath already begun, and therefore, we may justly presume, he will compleat. If a moral and religious behaviour be, according to the natural course of things in this world, beneficial to men, and a wicked and impious one hurtful; as I hope you have often heard them proved to be: then we have clear evidence of fact, that God, who hath made them so, doth actually reward the one and punish the other. And though at present his recompences are neither exactly proportioned, nor without exception constant: yet, as we see many reasons, that may justly occasion this, and cannot but acknowledge there may be many more; there arises, from the whole, great foundation for hope, that the plain distinction, which he made already, will be yet more perfectly made in a proper time. So that there is no need for us to apprehend we must necessarily be miserable here, in order to be happy hereafter; or to lie under the imputation of depreciating virtue, and making it good for nothing to its votaries, in this world, in order to secure it a retribution in the next. Reason doth not direct to that method: revelation hath not taken it: and the teachers and professors of Christia-

nity should avoid exposing themselves to a charge, from which Christianity itself is perfectly free.

But still, were we to speak of virtue, as always its own reward here, and attaining its end sufficiently in the compass of this narrow life ; that would be an extreme on the other hand, and a very pernicious one ; whatever great names have countenanced it, some with good designs, and some with bad. Such extravagant praises of moral beauty and excellency will seldom have any other effect, where they have most, than raising an enthusiasm for it, that will be little more than notional, or an affectation of it, that will be nothing more than talk. And with the cooler part of mankind, attempting to persuade them of the contrary to what, in many cases, they see and feel, is losing all credit ; and making every thing that is said to the advantage of right conduct suspicious, by insisting on more, than can possibly be true.

The real state of the case is plainly this. A temper and behaviour of piety, justice, benevolence, and rational self-government, is fitted in its nature to make our lives here as happy, as we can make them. And therefore, though we had no farther prospect, our present interest would, generally speaking, consist in these things : and would always consist in them, if no particular circumstances happened, to make exceptions. But the misfortune is, that such circumstances do frequently happen. Some men have, from their very constitution, peculiarly strong propensities to sin, which give them long and painful exercise ; and, after all, can barely be kept under, not rooted out, let them do what they will. Is this a state of enjoyment, and its own reward ? or a state of warfare, that requires a future recompence, proportionable to the sufferings of it,

to make it eligible? but others are yet more unhappy. They have added evil habits to evil inclinations; and, if they will amend their ways, must feel deep remorse for what they have done amiss already; and go through infinite difficulties to do right for the time to come, in contradiction to all their bad customs, their inflamed passions, their vicious friends: must bear great reproach, perhaps undergo much loss, in making reparation for the injuries they have committed; when the whole of this might possibly have been avoided, by persisting in their former course. And, it may be, after all, they have a prospect at most, barely of living long enough to accomplish the change, but not to enjoy it. Who is there now, that can well be more *miserable*, than such a man's resolution of amendment makes him, *if in this life only he hath hope*? Here then is a plain case, in which the belief of a future state is able to defend the cause of virtue, and every thing else unable. But that, already mentioned, of persecution, is a plainer still. When men are to suffer shame and infamy, penalties and imprisonments, pains and tortures, for the sake of true religion, as multitudes have done; or of moral honesty, as has been the case of too many: what is there in the fullest consciousness of doing their duty, sufficient to compensate for these things, to souls of any common make, if such consciousness alone be all the comfort they are to have, and even that very soon, perhaps instantly to die with them? Undoubtedly the sense of acting as we ought is a powerful support. But, in cases of extremity, it is mocking the miseries of the good, to propose that single remedy, as enough for them. And though it may happen but seldom, that they *suffer a great deal for righteousness sake*;* yet they very often suffer more or less for it. And who-

* 1 Pet. iii. 14.

ever doth not see, how happy it is in every instance of this sort, and how necessary in most, that the encouragements of futurity should come in to the assistance of the present motives to do well ; hath either very little attention to the weakness of human minds ; or very little concern to have virtue practised, how vehemently soever he may plead for its being applauded.

I will not enlarge on a farther consideration, though an exceedingly material one, that the sufferings, which mankind in general have to go through, are so frequent and so heavy, that there is much need of a better prospect to alleviate them ; and though the pious and virtuous were never to be the *most miserable of all men*, yet *all men*, in one part or another of their days, would be *miserable* more than enough, *if they had hope in this life only*.

The expectation of future blessedness therefore, even when it was more doubtful, was *a light shining in a dark place*,* to cheer the fainting hearts, and direct the wandering steps of the children of men. Yet still to have happiness in their view, with such uncertainty as former ages were in, whether it could be attained or not, must unquestionably mix great anxiety with their expectations ; and leave their circumstances, on the whole, very pitiable. But God, in his mercy, hath removed all doubts from us ; not only by express promises, but an experimental proof also, of a resurrection to life everlasting, in the person of our blessed Lord : that through him we *might have the strongest consolation, when we fly for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us : which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, and which entereth within the veil ; whither also the fore-runner is already entered for us, even Jesus.*†

* 2 Pet. i. 19.

† Heb. vi. 18—20.

You cannot but see then, of what great consequence it is for all wise men to encourage this faith, and all good men to have frequent recourse to it. For the principal reason, why we are, most of us, so faulty and so wretched, in this life is, that we attend so little to the rewards of another. We ourselves perhaps do not suspect, how little it is. Would God that every one who hears me, would make a diligent examination, what share of his desires, his hopes, and his fears, the unseen world takes up; and seriously ask himself, whether it can possibly be fit, that the infinitely most important part of his condition should be allowed so very much the least part in his thoughts.

But then to think of our condition to good effect; we must be sure, not to set our minds more on the privileges, than the duties of it; but remember, that as the virtuous would sometimes be the most miserable of men, if there were no expectation of futurity; so the vicious must be always the most miserable, if there be any. Every promise of the Gospel is a threatening to them: and the doctrine of salvation will only condemn them to severer punishments. *Let every man therefore, who hath hope in Christ, purify himself, even as he is pure.** And let every man who desires to do so, remember, that he can do it only by a stedfast belief, that Christ died and rose again on our account; *for this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith:†* by an humble dependance on grace from above, to be obtained by our prayers; *for we are not sufficient of ourselves to do any thing:‡* and by a diligent and constant use of that grace, in labouring to perform every part of our duty; for we are to *work out our own salvation, because God worketh in us, both to will and to do.§*

* 1 John iii. 3.

† 2 Cor. iii. 15,

‡ 1 John v. 4.

§ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

S E R M O N IX.

MATTH. xii. 31, 32.

WHEREFORE I SAY UNTO YOU : ALL MANNER OF SIN AND
BLASPHEMY SHALL BE FORGIVEN UNTO MEN : BUT
THE BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST SHALL NOT
BE FORGIVEN UNTO MEN.

AND WHOSOEVER SPEAKETH A WORD AGAINST THE SON
OF MAN, IT SHALL BE FORGIVEN HIM : BUT WHOSO-
EVER SPEAKETH AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST, IT SHALL
NOT BE FORGIVEN HIM, NEITHER IN THIS WORLD,
NEITHER IN THE WORLD TO COME.

THESE words of our blessed Lord seldom, if ever,
fail to excite a peculiar attention and alarm in the
minds of all, who read or hear them : and the doctrine,
which they contain, appears to some, either so diffi-
cult to be understood, or so improper to be admitted ;
and fills others with such terrors, or sinks them into
such despondency ; that, for the sake of great num-
bers, it should be well explained from time to time.
And men ought to have the nature of this crime laid
before them, when they are not disturbed within by
the imagination of having committed it. For when
they are, the agitation of their minds too commonly
disqualifies them from judging rightly concerning either
the sense of the text, or even their own actions.

Now there are several sins against the Holy Ghost,

mentioned in Scripture; *Lying to*,* *resisting*,† *tempting*,‡ *grieving*,§ *quenching the Spirit*:|| yet none of these is ever said to be unpardonable; and therefore, we may be sure, none of them is so: because, if it had, undoubtedly the word of God would have given us that warning in relation to it: whereas on the contrary, the text itself, in the plainest words, assures us, that every sin is pardonable, excepting one, which is different from all these. If then either the wicked, reflecting on their guilt, or the innocent, overcome with groundless fears, are apprehensive, that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, as they usually call it, and therefore cannot be forgiven: they should, in the first place, be asked, or ask themselves, and answer distinctly, what sin against the Holy Ghost they have committed? What the particular thing is, that weighs so heavy upon them? For unless it be precisely *blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, there is no pretence for saying, they cannot be forgiven. There are but three passages in the Bible, that mention this matter: the text; Mark iii. 28, 29. and Luke xii. 10: in every one of which, the very same word, *blasphemy*, is used; and no other. So that, of whatever sin else against the divine Spirit they may have been guilty, if they have not been guilty of that, they may undoubtedly be forgiven. And this single observation, duly attended to, is sufficient to preserve, or even restore, the quiet of multitudes. But still too many, for want of understanding the nature of the blasphemy which our blessed Lord here means, may falsely conceive themselves to be chargeable with it: whilst others, of a different turn, may wonder, or be much offended, at finding so terrible a denunciation against it: and a third sort, if they

* Acts v. 3.

† Acts vii. 51.

‡ Acts v. 9.

§ Eph. iv. 30.

|| 1 Thess. v. 19.

perceive no danger of actually incurring this condemnation, may by no means consider, so seriously as they ought, how near it they may come. I shall therefore endeavour to shew,

I. What the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, mentioned by our Saviour, is.

II. What is intended by his declaration, that *it shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, nor that to come.*

III. Why he passes so heavy a sentence on this one sin.

IV. What things do, or do not, approach towards it.

I. What the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, mentioned by our Saviour, is.

Now the term *blasphemy*, in the original language of the New Testament, whence we have derived it into our own, signifies nothing else, than speaking evil of any one unjustly. And it is frequently used to denote speaking evil of our equals; but more peculiarly, of our superiors; and therefore, most eminently of God the Father Almighty, his Son and Spirit: to which three alone this expression is confined in our vulgar tongue. Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost therefore is speaking irreverently and injuriously of the Holy Ghost: which may be done, by vilifying either his person, or his works. But of the former our Saviour doth not speak: for nothing had happened, which could lead him to it. The Jews, whom he was reproofing, professed, and had, the highest veneration for the Spirit of God: therefore they had certainly uttered no personal reproaches against him: indeed it doth not appear, that they had named him in what gave rise to the declaration, made in the text. But the case, to lay it before you in the words of the Gospel, was this. *There was brought to him one pos-*

essed with a devil, blind and dumb ; and he healed him : and all the people were amazed, and said; *Is not this the son of David ? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.* It follows, *And Jesus knew their thoughts.** Upon which he argued with them, that destroying the works of the devil, his influence over the bodies and souls of men, could not proceed from the devil himself, for that would be overturning his own kingdom ; but evidently shewed a power opposite and superior to his : and then he subjoined the words now under consideration ; which many learned interpreters have understood thus : that such, as were ignorantly led by common prejudice to speak against Christ, appearing only as a Son of Man ; and, taking him for a mere man, reproached him with being *the carpenter's son,†* or even *gluttonous and a wine-bibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners;‡* might, notwithstanding, come to see their mistake, and be forgiven ; but when he performed miracles, before their eyes, to rectify their opinion, as he had just done then ; if they reviled these also, ascribing them to the agency of the devil, contrary to all reason, and perhaps to their own consciences too ; (for thus some understand the observation, that *Jesus knew their thoughts;*) this was *adding sin to sin;§* was in effect imputing wickedness to the Holy Spirit of God, by representing what was plainly done by him, as done by an evil Being ; and should not be pardoned. Nor can it be denied, but this interpretation seems to be much confirmed by St. Mark ; who observes, that our Saviour gave them this warning, *because they said, he had an unclean spirit.||*

* Matth. xii. 22—25. † Matth. xiii. 55. ‡ Matth. xi. 19.
 Luke vii. 34. § Is. xxx. 1. || Mark iii. 30.

But still other eminent men, though they allow, that he *cast out devils*, as himself expressly affirms,* and performed the rest of his wonderful works, *by the Spirit of God*, which is the same with the Holy Ghost; yet remark very truly, that this phrase, *the Holy Ghost*, these words thus joined, in the Gospels and Acts never signify the power of working miracles, but often signify the spiritual gifts, of speaking with tongues and the like, which the Apostles received: and that accordingly, though they had long before done many miracles, as well as their master, we are told notwithstanding in the New Testament, that *the Holy Ghost was not yet given*;† but promised, after our blessed Lord's ascension. From hence then they argue, that conformably to this manner of speaking, *blasphemy against the Holy Ghost* must mean vilifying, not the miraculous operations, of which the Spirit was the author then; but the farther manifestations of himself, which were soon to follow them; and our Saviour must design in the text to inform his opposers, that all they had said, and all they should say, of him, while he remained on earth, as a *deceiver of the people*,‡ and even one that *had a devil*,§ might be forgiven them: but if, when he was gone to the Father; and the *comforter*, or advocate, for so it should be translated, *come*,|| by supernatural gifts to *convince the world of sin*, because they had not believed on him;¶ if they should go on then to speak evil of these also, their guilt should never be remitted. And, in confirmation of this exposition, they observe further, that Christ, at his death, prayed the *Father to forgive*** his crucifiers, though at the same time they reviled and derided both him and

* Matth. xii. 28.

† John vii. 39.

‡ John vii. 12.

§ Matth. xi. 18.

Luke vii. 33.

|| John xv. 26.

¶ John xvi. 8, 9.

** Luke xxiii. 34.

his miracles; *he saved others, himself he cannot save; let Christ the king of Israel descend now from the cross, and we will believe him* :* and that, suitably to his master's example, St. Peter intreated them afterwards to *repent and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out*,† which therefore was yet possible: but when, they still resisted the Holy Ghost, after these fuller proofs of his interposition, *contradicting and blaspheming*; then the Apostles *turned from them as unworthy of everlasting life*, and went to the Gentiles.‡

This latter interpretation, I confess, appears to me the more probable. But, in this they agree: that the blasphemy, which is pronounced unpardonable, was not speaking evil of the person of the Holy Ghost, but of the miraculous powers which he exerted: and the difference is only, what miraculous powers are meant; whether those mighty works, which our Saviour performed by means of the divine Spirit, while on earth; or those gifts, which were poured forth on men, after he ascended to heaven: a question, easy, no doubt, to be answered then; but of no importance to us now.

What we are concerned to remark farther is, that our blessed Lord's denunciation was pointed, not against such blasphemy or evil speaking, as mere mistake or inconsiderateness might lead men into; but such, as proceeded from wilful and deliberate wickedness: for with this he charges the Jews, immediately after the text: *O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh*.§ Nor doth he pass so dreadful a sentence on the use of opprobrious language, concerning operations of the Spirit, ma-

* Matth. xxvii. 42. Mark xv. 32.

† Acts iii. 19.

‡ Acts xiii. 45, 46.

§ Matth. xii. 34.

nifested in distant places or times ; but concerning miracles performed, or supernatural gifts exercised, before mens own eyes ; for that advantage they, to whom he spoke, enjoyed. Nor did even they fall under this condemnation for every hasty expression of contempt ; but for such, as they continued to utter, after a sufficient time allowed them to grow cool and serious, and reflect. For when, upon the Apostles receiving the gift of tongues, there were some, that *mocking said, These men are full of new wine ;** though it was certainly a blaspheming saying in itself, and came from a wrong disposition of mind, and reflected on a work of the Holy Ghost done in their own presence ; yet being only a sudden flight, St. Peter did not impute it as blasphemy to them, but merely as rashness of judgment ; and therefore applied himself to convince them of their mistake, with so good effect, that 3,000 were converted that very day. On the whole, therefore, the only persons, whom we have ground to think guilty of *the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, meant in the text, are they, who from bad motives, and, as we say, in cold blood, revile and rail against such operations of the divine Spirit, as are performed in their own presence. Let us now inquire,

II. What is the true sense of our Saviour's declaration, that this one sin *shall not be forgiven, neither in this present world, nor that to come.*

Some have apprehended him to mean only, that all passionate and injurious language on common occasions shall be considered as mere human infirmity, that doth not put men out of a state of salvation ; whereas the like language concerning the miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost doth : brings them into a condition of spiritual death here, which unless they

* Acts ii. 13.

rise again from it by a particular repentance, will be followed by eternal death, hereafter. But surely it is taking much too great liberty; first, by *all manner of sin and blasphemy* to understand only all sinful evil-speaking about common matters, though our Saviour hath specified speaking against himself: then to say, that all evil-speaking about common matters is consistent with salvation; and lastly, when the text affirms peremptorily, that *the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, and that alone, *shall not be forgiven*; to add, unless men particularly repent of it; a limitation, for which there is not the least authority, and which would bring down this sin to just the same level with many more. Some again think the words of our blessed Lord, though expressed absolutely, are meant only in comparison; that all other sins will be forgiven sooner; and this with the most difficulty of any. But, though doubtless there are some instances, especially in the Old Testament, where what is said positively, must be understood comparatively: yet, I think none will be found of that sort, where the assertion is made with such great and calm solemnity, and so circumstantially. Lastly, not a few, observing that in all writers, the most general denunciations often admit no small number of particular exceptions, conceive, that this before us may*. But then some foundation must always appear for such exceptions, either in other passages of the same or other writers, concerning the same matter, or in the nature of the thing: and no such foundation hath yet been shewn in the present case. Besides, the declaration, that *blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be for-*

* Erasmus in his Paraphrase interprets it, *vix inveniet veniam*. And Latimer in Strype's Memorials, vol. ii. p. 70. saith, This sin is called unforgiveable, because seldom forgiven: but on repentance it may.

given, is itself an exception from a general rule, that *all manner of sin shall be forgiven*: and to suppose other exceptions again from this exception, seems very unnatural. It would indeed be presumptuous to restrain the mercies of God: but it is equally and perhaps more dangerous to extend them farther, than he permits us.

The addition, that this sin *shall neither be forgiven in this world, nor the world to come*, is taken by many for no more, than a stronger and fuller way of saying, that it *shall not* or *shall never, be forgiven*: which are the expressions used in St. Mark and St. Luke. Some understand by it, neither in the age or dispensation of the Law, which was then present, when our Saviour spoke; nor of the Gospel, which was ready to take place of it: for so the phrases, *this world*, and *the world to come*, are used in some passages of the New Testament. But others, with good appearance of truth, carry the meaning further, and apprehend it to be; that, whereas corrections, and severe ones, are inflicted on many sins in this life, which yet, through the grace and mercy of God, are not imputed, to mens condemnation, at the last day: for this sin, on the contrary, both heavy punishment should fall on the guilty here, and heavier yet hereafter. And accordingly, in fact, these blasphemous Jews underwent, in a few years, the most dreadful judgments: nor have we cause to think of their eternal state otherwise, than with great horror. Such then being the sense of our Saviour's words let us enquire,

III. Why he passed a sentence, thus peculiarly severe, against this one only sin.

Now, had the offence been speaking irreverently concerning the person of the Holy Ghost: it would not have been easy to assign any reason, why that

should be less pardonable, than the same irreverence towards the Father, or the Son. But since, as you have seen, it was vilifying his miraculous operations and gifts : there appear in it the most evident marks of such guilt and danger, as could belong to no other. It was the greatest and wilfullest obstinacy in the wrong, that can be imagined ; when they, and all around them, saw the most illustrious and beneficial miracles, done in confirmation of the most holy and benevolent doctrine, to stand out in opposition to both : to insist, that the devil conspired against himself, rather than own the finger of God, where it was so exceedingly visible : and not only to blaspheme the Son of man thus, during his state of humiliation, at which indeed their prejudices might naturally take some considerable offence ; but after he was *exalted by the right hand of God*,* and had *baptised his Apostles with the Holy Ghost, and with fire*, as John had foretold he should ;† and enabled them by that means, both to do *greater works than himself*,‡ and besides to *understand all mysteries*,§ to *discern and make manifest the secrets of hearts*,|| to *speak with unknown tongues*, ¶ to *shew beforehand things to come*,** to confer the same gifts on whom they would ; and when every assembly of Christians afforded almost daily proofs of these things ; to persist yet, neither *entering into the kingdom of Heaven themselves, nor suffering others to enter in* ;†† and not only to oppose, but to revile, the strongest evidence, laid before them in the fullest manner ; and that, very probably, against the secret conviction of their own hearts too : such behaviour manifests the most hardened and desperate

* Acts ii. 33.

† Matth. iii. 11.

‡ John xiv. 12.

§ 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

|| 1 Cor. xii. 10. xiv. 25.

¶ 1 Cor. xiv. 2, &c.

** John xiv. 13.

†† Matth. xxiii. 12.

wickedness. All men must suppose it, and our Saviour knew it, to proceed from an incurable disease within ; prevailing over the powerfulest and last remedy, which divine wisdom thought fit to use : and therefore his declaration, however awful, was but the natural consequence of the state they were in. Had they only doubted, had they only denied, there might have been some hope of them : but when men are come to railing and blaspheming, as they were, they have done with attending and considering. Yet still, had they only rejected the testimony of others concerning the wonderful operations and gifts of the Spirit ; stronger testimony of others, or that of their own senses, might have been added : but when this last had been vouchsafed them, there could possibly be no higher. It might indeed appear to them, on maturer reflection, more convincing than at first : but after sufficient leisure to reflect had been also allowed them, as I have shewn you it was ; every thing, that could be done for them, consistently with leaving them freedom of will, had been done, and all in vain.

This, you see, is plainly a very different case from that of any other sin. And the peculiar guilt and danger of it consists, not in its being committed against the Holy Spirit ; but in its being a wilful and obstinate rejection, from wicked motives, of the only means remaining for reformation and forgiveness. Suppose the providence of God had so ordered it, that all diseases should be curable, by some one particular course of medicine : still whoever despised and ridiculed that course, instead of taking it, must perish. And in like manner, though all sins would else be pardonable through the grace of the Gospel : whoever scorns the utmost efforts of that grace, must fail of it. And our Saviour foreseeing, that these persons would,

pronounces their doom. Every advantage, that any others ever were to enjoy, they had enjoyed to the full, without effect: and it was not suitable to the honour of God's government, or the holiness of his nature, to strive with such by still more extraordinary methods; and do for the worst of men, what he had not done for the rest. Their condition, therefore, was not, that they should be denied pardon, though they did repent; but it was foreknown, that they would not repent. So that whoever doth, may be sure, for that very reason, that he hath not been guilty of the unpardonable *blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*. Indeed no one now, when, through length of time, the circumstances of the case are so much altered, can lie under the same guilt with those, to whom our Saviour spoke: nor can he therefore be under the same condemnation: for *the judgment of God is always according to truth*.^{*} But though we cannot equal the wickedness of the Jews in this respect, yet we may come dreadfully near it. And therefore I proceed now to shew you,

IV. What sins do, or do not, approach towards that, which is mentioned in the text.

And here I shall speak separately, first of the case of unbelievers in Christ, then of believers in him.

Unbelievers, ignorant of the Gospel, or of its proper evidence, and who could not help their ignorance, are not blameable for their unbelief: nor surely inexcusable, though they should add reproachful words to it, *speaking evil of things which they know not*.[†] And though it be a great unhappiness to them, that they have neither the same means of reformation and spiritual improvement, nor the same assurance of pardon

^{*} Rom. ii. 2.

[†] Jude 10.

and acceptance, that Christians have: yet it is their unhappiness only, not their fault. But such unbelievers, as through a contemptuous negligence refuse to consider the doctrine of Christ, or from a vain opinion of the sufficiency of their own reason, or from love to any sin, reject it; these put themselves in the high road towards the sin, condemned here by our Saviour. And if they add to their infidelity profane and irreverent language; they advance nearer to it. But if part of that language be ascribing the miracles and spiritual gifts, mentioned in the New Testament, to an evil power, of which some amongst them have given intimations; and above all, if they do this from a malicious heart, and perhaps against their own inward persuasion too; then they come as near to it, as they are able. And yet one cannot but hope, that, since the evidence of the Gospel is not either quite so full and strong, or so obvious and easily seen at once, as it was in the days of our Saviour and his Apostles; they may, after all, think better of it, repent, and obtain pardon.

If indeed they have, since they came to a full use of reason, deliberately professed Christianity, and then forsaken it, and become railers and scoffers at it; this case is worse than if they had never believed; in proportion as they have seen the evidences, understood the nature, and felt the influences of the Gospel; and yet, after all, have broken the faith, which they had solemnly engaged to it. The Epistle to the Hebrews therefore declares *it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they*

*crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.** But then, explicit and terrible as these words are, yet some of them plainly relate to those miraculous gifts and powers, which we do not now experience, and therefore cannot sin against them to that degree, nor by consequence make our condition so desperate, as those who did: besides that *impossible*, both in Scripture and common language, often means no more, than extremely difficult and hopeless; but not beyond the reach of His grace, *with whom all things are possible.†* And as this impossibility is expressly here said to be that of *renewing them to repentance*: (which powerfully strengthens what I have already proved to you, that the *blasphemy against the Holy Ghost* is unpardonable, only because it leaves no foundation to repent upon) so when any one is *renewed to repentance*, this passage contains not the least intimation, that he cannot be forgiven.

But supposing a total and settled unbelief and apostasy to be ever so irretrievable; yet merely having doubted, nay having inclined to the wrong side, or even been a good deal persuaded of it, and that for some time, is very far from being the same case. The Apostles themselves at first did not believe the resurrection of our Saviour: St. Thomas stood out a whole week: two of them in St. Luke speak of their persuasion, that this was *he who should have redeemed Israel*, as past and at an end.‡ Yet, as all this arose from infirmity, not wickedness, they met with an easy pardon; and so will others like them. But few of those, whom sensuality, and fewer still, whom vain self-opinion leads to scepticism, ever recover themselves. And as this affords no small confirmation to the awful doctrine of the text: so it should warn all from taking

* Heb. vi. 4—6.

† Matth. xix. 26.

‡ Luke xxiv. 21.

so much as the first steps in that fatal path, from which men so seldom return: but especially against setting out with treating religion and morals in a scornful and ludicrous manner; which is directly opposite to modest and humble inquiry; manifests a very criminal partiality, as well as sufficiency; and naturally terminates in a complete disregard to every thing wise and good.

Thus much concerning infidels and apostates. Christians, while they continue such, are in very little danger of committing the sin, condemned in the text. Some indeed have imagined, that every deliberate transgression amounted to it, and was unpardonable; because the Epistle to the Hebrews saith, that *if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment.** But then it appears very plainly, that not any wilful sin whatever is meant there, but that one only, which is mentioned immediately before and after; laying aside *the profession of the faith, treading under foot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, doing despite unto the Spirit of Grace:* that is, renouncing and reviling Christianity. And it by no means follows, that because they, who have rejected Christ, will no where find any other atonement for their sins, therefore they who believe in him, but have criminally violated some of his precepts, cannot partake of his atonement, though they apply for it with penitent hearts. It is very true, St. John hath told us, *there is a sin unto death*, at least was in those days, of which if any one was guilty, he could give no encouragement to *pray for him.*† But the whole Scripture tells us, that not every wilful sin is certainly

* Heb. x. 26, 27.

† 1 John v. 16.

unto death: and our Saviour in the text hath told us, that only the *blasphemy*, the malicious evil speaking, *against the Holy Ghost* is such. Now they who believe in the Father and the Son cannot surely think ill either of the person or the operations of the Spirit; and therefore cannot be ordinarily tempted to speak ill of them, with any real meaning of what they say: and unmeaning profane expressions, though undoubtedly very full of guilt, and likely to produce more and greater guilt, are yet far from that most abandoned wickedness, to which the passage before us relates.

Sometimes indeed Christians, and very good ones, may accuse themselves of having entertained irreverent thoughts, and, it may be, spoken irreverent words of religion, of the Scriptures, of the Holy Spirit himself: but this hath been, when they were under so peculiar a disturbance of mind, that they had not the command of their thoughts or words: and then they may be absolutely sure, that the all-knowing, just, and good God will not consider these offences, as, in a moral sense, theirs. In some disorders, it is no more possible for men to hinder wicked thoughts from taking possession of their minds, or blasphemous words from coming out of their mouths, than to hinder any other distemper, (for plainly this is one) which may attack any other part of them, from shewing itself by its common effects. And it is no more a crime, when they are in such a condition, to utter things even against God; than it is for a child, in convulsions or light-headed, to strike its parent. And though they may not think themselves disordered, and in other respects may not be so; yet in this want of self-government, proportionably to the degree of it, they certainly are. And it makes no difference at all

with regard to their innocence, whether the disorder be a natural bodily one, affecting the mind ; which is notoriously the common case, though attended sometimes with very unaccountable symptoms ; or whether it arise from the suggestions of the wicked one. For as he tempted Christ himself, so he hath ever since molested Christians ; and often suggested the worst of things to the best of men. Our words indeed, notwithstanding such temptations, we may for the most part restrain : but we can by no means always prevent impressions being made on our imaginations : and how strongly soever any one may experience them to be made on his, still the wicked thoughts, which he laments all the while, is terrified at, and almost in agonies about, certainly do not proceed from his own will and choice ; and for that reason, far from being unpardonable sins, they are in truth no sins at all ; but grievous afflictions, for which God will hereafter reward him, if he endeavours to suffer them patiently. This you would immediately perceive, and say, in the case of any other person : and therefore, when occasion requires, you should say it to yourself. But if you cannot, or if it proves to no great purpose, nay to so little that you are driven to the very borders of despair, yet despair itself, so far as it is a mere disease, is not an offence against God.

But then, how remote soever we are from committing the sin, which cannot be pardoned ; we may too easily commit such, as will not be pardoned : for none will, without true repentance. And every transgression either invites or drives us into repeated and worse transgressions, which insensibly so *harden us through their deceitfulness*,* that though, while the *day of salvation*† continues, we always may repent, it becomes

* Heb. iii. 13.

† 2 Cor. vi. 2.

less and less likely, that we ever shall. And even if we do, we shall, notwithstanding, even in this world, usually be great sufferers one way or another : and, unless we become uncommonly zealous in our duty, shall attain a much lower degree of happiness in the next. Bear in your minds therefore the Son of Sirach's words : *Flee from sin, as from the face of a serpent : for if thou comest too near it, it will bite thee : the teeth thereof are as the teeth of a lion, slaying the souls of men. All iniquity is as a two edged sword, the wounds whereof cannot be healed :** cannot be healed at all, without danger and difficulty and pain ; nor so perfectly at best, but that still either weakness, or scars and deformities however, will be left behind. Let us therefore carefully avoid all sin : but particularly avoid all sins relating to the Holy Ghost, and practise all duties relating to him : that so, abiding in his fellowship, being supported by his testimony, and rejoicing in his comfort, we may at length be sealed with the spirit of promise, the earnest of that inheritance,† to which, &c.

* Ecclus. xxi. 2, 3.

† Eph. i. 13, 14.

S E R M O N X.

MATTH. xii. 36.

BUT I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT EVERY IDLE WORD, THAT MEN SHALL SPEAK, THEY SHALL GIVE ACCOUNT THERE-OF IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

OUR blessed Saviour, whenever his hearers were persons of well-disposed minds, and free from prejudices, taught them the duties of religion in the plainest terms. But length of time, and difference of language, have made some of his expressions, even on such occasions, hard to be understood, or liable to be misunderstood : and hence, unless we are both upright and considerate, may arise mistakes of great importance. For if we interpret these passages with too much indulgence to ourselves, as human nature is very prone to do, we corrupt the purity of his precepts, and endanger our own salvation : first aiming at less than we ought, then of course falling short of that. And yet the opposite extreme, of straining them too high, hath seldom done good, and often harm : hath deterred weak spirits from taking the burthen of religion upon them, entangled scrupulous tempers with endless perplexities, and made rigid ones uncharitable and superstitious : given the enemies of christianity opportunities of declaiming against it, as unnaturally severe ; and tempted the careless professors of it, after rejecting, as they well might, the over-strict sense of such phrases, not to take the pains of looking for

any other ; but go on, unrestrained by them, to live as they please.

Thus it hath happened in relation to the text of Scripture, which I have just read to you. Some few, understanding by *every idle word*, every needless or trifling one ; and by *giving account*, being condemned ; have either forced themselves to an absurd reservedness and silence in company, or been very uneasy, that they were unable to do it ; while the profane have ridiculed both them and the Gospel, on that account. But the generality of mankind, soon perceiving, that this could not be the meaning of the words, have never concerned themselves to inquire what was ; but have freely taken all the same liberties in discourse, as if no such warning had ever been given by our blessed Lord.

Now that he was far from the intention of laying down unsociable rules for behaviour, his whole character sufficiently shews ; which was in no respect harsh and austere, but humane and conversible. The whole temper of his religion proves it yet more fully : it is *an easy yoke* ;* it enjoins *whatsoever things are lovely and of good report* :† it enjoins particularly, *being courteous* ;‡ of which being affable is a material part : and this can never consist with disapproving, as unlawful, every word that might have been spared. Discourse on subjects of little or no importance is as necessary, at times, for the relaxation of our minds, as exercise without business for the refreshment of our bodies. It is a proper exertion of that cheerfulness, which God hath plainly designed us to shew, on small occasions, as well as great. Besides, it wins and engages those, whom speechless or sententious gravity might not only displease, but prepossess

* Matth. xi. 30.

† Phil. iv. 8.

‡ 1 Pet. iii. 8.

against every thing good : whereas observing, even in slight matters, the Apostle's rule, of *graceful speech*, (for so the best interpreters understand what is translated *speech with grace*) *seasoned with salt*, that we may know how we ought to answer every man,* both expresses and increases mutual good-will ; and enables us, from being innocently entertaining, to become seriously useful. We may be sure therefore, that whatever discourse hath this general good tendency, and no bad one, be there otherwise ever so little use or significance in it, cannot be in any blameable sense, *idle words*.

And indeed, if we look into what precedes the text, we shall find it was not occasioned by persons saying more than they needed, but other things than they ought. And therefore learned men have supposed this phrase, of *idle words*, to be one of those many, in all writers, which imply more than they express. In Scripture, *unfruitful works of darkness* † means pernicious works : what is *unprofitable for you*, ‡ means what would be hurtful to you. In common speech, a worthless man, is one, who, besides having no good, hath much harm in him. And thus they understand an *idle word* to be not merely an useless, but a false assertion, which is almost always, at the same time, in one way or other, an injurious one : such as evidently those were, of which our Saviour is here speaking. An interpretation, that undoubtedly removes all appearance of harshness from this part of his doctrine, and is not without support from the use of the term in old writers. Yet still, the solemn form of introduction, *But I say unto you*, seldom, if ever, used by him, when he taught only common and known truths, inclines one strongly to look for somewhat farther, than a bare declaration,

* Col. iv. 6.

† Eph. v. 11.

‡ Heb. xiii. 17.

that injurious and calumniating language is sinful. And, in fact, the expression, *idle words*, in the Jewish language, sometimes denotes all such, as make up the careless easy conversation of our leisure-time: agreeably to which, the writers in it mention them, often with contempt, or lower marks of dislike, as there is too often cause: but now and then also with a degree of praise: as when a noted commentator of theirs, who lived above 500 years ago,* explains that passage in the first psalm, *His leaf also shall not wither*, from Rabbins yet older than himself, thus: that *even the idle talk*, so he expresses it, *of a good man ought to be regarded*: the most superfluous things he saith, are always of some value. And other ancient authors have the same phrase nearly in the same sense.

Our Saviour therefore probably intended here to say, that *we shall give an account, in the day of judgment*, of our most unguarded and unmeaning discourse. Not that we shall be charged with the whole of it, as criminal. God forbid! We may as well be charged with every needless inarticulate sound or bodily gesture.† The Apostle speaks of persons *giving their account with joy*.‡ And so may we give ours, even concerning this part of our conversation, if we take care to be such as we ought. For *make the tree good*: and both *the fruit* § and the leaves will be so too. The full sense of the text then is, that not only our studied and deliberate, but our slighter and more negligent words, as well as actions, will, in proportion to their weight, have an influence on the future determination of our everlasting state. It appears, from what goes before, that some of the Jews had been maliciously ascribing

* R. David Kimchi.

† And indeed the Stoic Doctrine was: *Digitum exere, peccas*. Pers. Sat. V. v. 119.

‡ Heb. xiii. 17.

§ Matth. xii 33.

the miracles of Christ to infernal powers. Others, without question, as it always happens, had thoughtlessly taken up and spread the notion, which they had heard. He therefore, after confuting the former, lets the latter also know their share of the guilt, by adding, that, on every occasion, *out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh.* A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things : and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things. Then he goes on : *But I say unto you, that every idle word, that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.**

Designed expressions, in discourse, of impiety towards God, injustice to man, disregard to virtue or decency, can proceed only from an abandoned heart. But the conversation of most persons is full of unobserved faults and bad tendencies : which, like a multitude of small expences, make us debtors beyond what we could imagine ; and by continual, though slighter impressions on our morals and piety, gradually undermine what the most violent open assault could not have overturned. Each particular offence appears a trifle : some, taken alone, almost imperceptible : they disguise themselves under the shew of that cheerful freedom, without which human life would be quite uncomfortable : and thus a number of enemies, entering single, form a body at length, that masters the place. Now though it may seem no great oversight to admit one or two of these ; yet not to be alarmed as they increase upon us, is unpardonable want of care. Therefore, to acquaint ourselves better with the danger, and the means of guarding against it, let us con-

* Matth. xii. 34—37.

sider, how common it is to speak in a very unfit manner, chiefly through inconsiderateness, of religion, moral virtue, and one another.

I. Of religion. Both prudence and good breeding, not to say a little distrust of their own abilities and impartiality, might induce even those, who have examined its authority, and doubt of its truth, if any such there be, still to be shy of declaring against what many others, and possibly some of equal abilities, after as full an examination, hold sacred. And yet such as have never examined in the least, nor once put a question to themselves about it, can, with a most contemptuous negligence, take for granted the falsehood of the most awful truths, and talk upon that supposition, in so assured and easy a manner, as if nobody differed from them. Whenever they do chance to hear of an argument, that seems to make for them, they applaud it even without understanding it. But a jest they look on, as superior to all argument: and if any text of Scripture can have an unfair ludicrous turn given it, or any article of faith be misrepresented into an absurdity, this they triumph in without mercy. Now whatever excuse there may be for the doubts or the mistakes, of inquisitive and humble minds: yet when the ignorant or thoughtless take upon them to despise the laws of Heaven, without pretence for it; and make the noblest hopes of human nature, the theme of their scorn and ridicule: this is a most heinous kind of idle discourse.

But there is another sort, though not so shocking, yet more extensively mischievous: when they, who profess religion, and think they are serious in the profession, as surely, if it be a truth, it is the most serious one that can be, allow themselves inadvertently in saying what tends to its ruin: when they speak with dis-

regard of the appointed methods of supporting it in the world : when they join in loose harangues against enthusiasm and superstition, without putting in due cautions to distinguish them from the most rational feelings of love, and marks of respect, to our Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, which Christianity hath enjoined : when they, who by no means intend to be profane, repeat the profane things that others have said or done, with indulgence and pleasure : when they carry on discourse, that reflects upon doctrines, which they themselves inwardly believe ; and treat duties with indifference, or even contempt, which at the same time they acknowledge, and, it may be, practise, as duties. This unmeaning compliance with fashionable talk, which they might easily avoid, yet not be remarkable ; or if they were, it would be to their honour ; brings them by degrees to think slightly of what they have been affecting to speak slightly of : till their piety wastes away into an empty form : and it is seldom long, before they grow ashamed of even that. Thus is their *mouth their destruction, and their lips the snare of their souls.** At least they lead others into a wrong way, who are afterwards tempted to go farther ; they permit themselves to be suspected ; they desert the defence of religion, when it wants all possible help ; and are false to their own cause. All good men therefore should be very careful, that their outward appearance do not contradict their inward faith. Doubtless there are seasons, in which pleasantry is proper : but there are subjects, on which it is never proper ; and religion is one. Abruptly intruding grave maxims into the midst of mirth, without any thing to call for them, would be disgustful and absurd. But still, whatever difference of manner different occasions may require, as they cer-

* Prov. xviii. 7.

tainly require a very great one ; we should always continue the same in our gayest hours, that we are in our most serious ; and preserve an uniformity of character throughout. Nor can there be any character more consistent or amiable, than theirs, whom dutiful regard to the greatest and best of beings influences, not only to be just and good in their behaviour, but sometimes instructive, sometimes entertaining, always innocent, in their conversation.

This head of irreligious idle words could not have been concluded, without severe animadversions on the monstrous custom of unmeaning oaths and imprecations, if the sinfulness of it were not so notorious, and so often set before you, that I hope you can have no doubt, but such language will be a dreadful article of account in the day of judgment. Let us therefore proceed to consider,

II. What sort of usage moral virtue frequently meets with, in our familiar discourse : not from any premeditated design against it ; for that belongs to another subject ; but principally through inadvertency. How favourably are most of us apt to speak even of gross vices, when high rank, or superficial agreeableness, give them a false lustre : and how commonly do we treat the basest and most cruel behaviour, that men are guilty of in pursuit of their pleasure, as matter of diversion only ; as no exceptions against their characters, but rather perhaps a kind of recommendation ! How imperfectly sometimes is the decency of conversation preserved amongst persons of tolerably good repute : in direct contradiction to the Apostle's precept, *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth :** and with what strange indulgence are offences of this kind usually received ! How thoughtlessly do

* Eph. iv. 29.

many applaud and propagate vile notions of human nature, that tend only to make it yet viler ; and gratify a preposterous vanity, by representing their species worse than it is. Concerning themselves indeed, the patrons of such opinions may, in a good measure, deserve belief. Yet even they are not quite so bad, as they absurdly endeavour to have it imagined, all mankind are ! How many again will defend immoralities, of which they would by no means be guilty : and are profligate in their discourse, while they are regular in their lives ! Nor doth it content us always, by our idle talk to keep wickedness in countenance : but we lay virtue under positive discouragements. Modesty and chastity, in one sex at least, with too many is a matter of great raillery. Of uprightness and honesty, on some occasions, we speak with but a contemptuous kind of approbation at best. Patience and forgiveness of injuries we treat as downright mean-spiritedness ; discretion in conduct, as a formal disagreeable thing ; frugality as an odious one, though requisite for the purposes of justice, or made subservient to those of charity. But especially where disadvantageous peculiarities throw any thing of a shade on the truest merit ; we are extremely apt to condemn and ridicule in the gross, what, however clouded, we ought to distinguish, and mention with due honour. A little ungracefulness of behaviour, or meanness of appearance, or defect in point of abilities, or ignorance of the world, though accompanied with a worthy heart, shall provoke a harder censure from us, than a mischievous turn of mind, or a vicious course of behaviour : nay we can fancy circumstances, when we find none, to render good qualities despicable. Then while we thus depreciate real virtues, we exalt imaginary ones into their places : false honour, false good-nature ; which

lead often to the worst of crimes, and disguise them under the best of names. In short, the conversation, even of those who are counted virtuous, by others and themselves, goes a great deal too much, without their attending to it, on maxims directly contrary to the principles which they avow: and places both the conduct and enjoyment of life upon a wrong footing. For instance: Are we not perpetually speaking of this present world, as if it were our all: nay, of the outward shew of things here, as if it were the true and only happiness of man? What impression must this make, by degrees, on the minds of those who hear us: indeed on our own? By thoughtlessly talking thus upon mistaken suppositions, we shall come at length to forget they are such; and act at least like those, who think them true. But let us now consider,

III. How wrongly we treat each other, in our careless easy discourse; not from deliberate ill-will, but by way of amusement.

One raises an idle story, to divert the company, at the expence of a person, who, it may be, hath not given the least ground for it. A second catches what he hears; perhaps believes it too hastily; perhaps doth not believe it, but tells it notwithstanding: a third fills it up with plausible circumstances: the general voice repeats it: and then, what every one says, passes for certain: especially if the composition be seasoned with a small spice of wit, it is universally relished, and lasts for a long time. But if besides, it lessens an honourable character; instead of doubting, or being sorry, people echo it with immoderate joy: and yet every one thinks himself clear of all blame, because he means only entertainment. Possibly he did: and yet, as neither he, nor they that heard him, would have been near so much entertained with a good report, as an ill one; there is almost always at the

bottom of this practice, a latent malignity of heart against our fellow-creatures ; *our brethren, for whom Christ died,** and whom both nature and religion command us to love. But whatever the principle be, the effects are very bad. Unthinking licentiousness of speech, concerning persons of high rank, may endanger even a nation's peace. And yet what numbers are there, that will venture to assert, without the least diffidence, whatever suits their humour, on matters, which perhaps they know nothing of: and when once they are got into the road of talk, quicken their pace, without perceiving it ; and will go any length, to keep one another company : so that, to use the terms of Scripture, *the beginning of the words of their mouth is foolishness : and the end, mischievous madness.†* But in private life, no one can tell, what unhappy consequences a false report to the disadvantage of another, though seemingly in a trifle, may have. Or if it were a true report ; let us ask ourselves, how could our tempers, how indeed would our characters bear, that every thing, which is true of us, should be spread abroad ? And were the person, who had done it, to say in his own defence, that he had no design of hurting us ; when however he had no regard, whether he hurt us or not ; would this appear a sufficient plea ? The harm done is not the less, often the greater, for the negligent manner it is done in. That procures belief : whereas apparent malice, or passion, would render what we say suspected. Besides, anger is frequently founded on provocations, that a little excuse the injuries it doth : but indolently treading under foot the reputations of others, is wanton cruelty ; that with the gayest indifference delivers persons over to reproach or contempt, it may be for life, rather than an ill-natured

* Rom. xiv. 15.

† Eccl. x. 13

story, or a lucky turn of words, shall be lost ; that puts the good name of another, on which his all may depend, into the balance, and lets the love of talk, the vanity of having early intelligence, or any other silly fancy, outweigh it. Every one should strive indeed to make such conversation harmless, by expressing a disregard and dislike to it. But, as this will never be done effectually ; so, if it were, the guilt of these charitable communicators would be much the same ; for they certainly did not design to be thus insignificant.

There is yet another, and frequently a more fatal way still, of injuring others by unmeaning discourse : when, merely to enliven the present hour, we give them, with false civility, a higher opinion of their own accomplishments, or our esteem of them, or good intentions towards them, than we ought. Many ridiculous mistakes, and many serious inconveniences, are men thus drawn into : they lose the little knowledge they had of themselves ; affect what misbecomes them, attempt what they are unequal to ; and take wrong steps in life, that always expose, and often ruin them : to the great diversion, sometimes, of those, who should be otherwise moved at seeing the mischief to which they have contributed.

These instances, without seeking for more, abundantly shew the need of watching over our freest and easiest conversation, and the justice of its undergoing God's final censure. *Lo, there is not a word in my tongue, but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether.** And whatever he observes whether good or bad in us, the righteous Judge of the whole earth will accordingly reward or punish. Perhaps we may not particularly foresee the harm we do by our irreligious, immoral, or injurious idle words : but we cannot help foreseeing,

* Ps. cxxxix. 3.

that not a little may arise from them : and it must be, in general, a wrong turn of mind, that prompts us to them. For as *the fruit declareth if the tree have been dressed ; so is the utterance of a conceit in the heart of man.** It is very true, that the government of the tongue at all times is a matter of great difficulty : and *if any one offend not in word, the same is a perfect man,*† indeed. But still we might offend much less than we do, and approach much nearer to this perfection, would we but often recollect, *that for these things also God will bring us into judgment :*‡ a consideration, that should make us, like the Psalmist, *keep our mouth, as it were, with a bridle.*§

Possibly it may be objected, that such attention as this would embarrass conversation, with endless restraints, which will make it quite disagreeable : and the awe of religion in our chearful moments, damp the whole pleasure of society. Nor can it be denied, that observing rules in their discourse, would, to some persons, for some time, be a grievous task. But so it is in every thing that we undertake to learn, especially if we have learnt wrong before : and yet we shall never learn to good purpose, without observing rules : and the closer pains we take at first, the more graceful and easier figure we shall make afterwards, in performances of any kind. Men of understanding and application may soon qualify themselves to be very entertaining on harmless and useful subjects : and consequently running into others must imply, either low abilities, or bad dispositions, or criminal thoughtlessness. But if conversation doth lose, by due regulations, a little of its poignancy ; it loses its venom too : and surely the delight of hearing, or saying, improper

* Ecclus. xxvii. 6.

† James iii. 2.

‡ Eccl. xi. 9.

§ Ps. xxxix. 2.

lively things, may well be given up, to avoid the exquisite uneasiness they sometimes cause, and the various ill effects they generally have. As for the awe of religion : were it in our choice, whether there should be an inspector of our actions and words and thoughts, or not ; it might deserve consideration, what influence on the comfort of our beings that inspection would have. But since we know there is one, under whose eye we live continually ; our only concern is to suit our behaviour to this our condition, be it more pleasing, or be it less. Not that in reality there could be a happier, than subjection to his fatherly care, who considers our frame, and *knoweth whereof we are made* :* who hath given us every principle of joy and delight, that belongs to our nature ; and approves of the innocent use of them all. But then the most indulgent superior, that will preserve himself a superior, as God assuredly will, must require so much regard to his presence, as shall restrain us, not only from wilful and flagrant offences, but from that supine negligence, which, though it be shewn in lesser instances only, yet, by the incessant repetition of them, argues great disregard : such, that, were we to consider ourselves only as God's creatures, we should be obliged to avoid conscientiously. But if we consider ourselves as fallen, sinful, redeemed creatures, redeemed by the love of him, whom *if we love we must keep his commandments*,† and whose wrath we shall not escape, *if we neglect so great salvation*,‡ here will be additional motives of the strongest sort, not only to set a watch before our mouths, and keep the door of our lips,§ but to purify our hearts,|| through faith in him : and when we have thus, for there is no other way, *healed the*

* Ps. ciii. 14.

† John xiv. 15.

‡ Heb. ii. 3.

§ Ps. cxli. 3.

|| Acts xv. 9.

*fountain, then it will send forth sweet water :** then, if the sense of our obligations, and our danger, in this respect, should, as it will, by representing conversation in a different light, from what we had seen it in before, moderate our fondness for it ; lessen the time we spend in it, and the share we take to ourselves of it ; make us cautious of saying more than hath at least a general good tendency, and careful to a greater degree, in proportion as we are obliged to live more in company, and as our discourse will be more regarded there : we shall plainly perceive, that no manner of harm follows, but more good than a little, by the leisure we thus gain for serious thought, valuable books, and requisite employments of several kinds. A more thorough acquaintance, in retirement, with ourselves and our duty, our own affairs and useful knowledge, will send us back into company, from time to time, greatly improved, both in proper subjects of discourse, and proper cautions for speaking of them in such a manner, as to be at once agreeable, innocent, and instructive. Thus prepared by the cool reflections of solitude, we might enjoy the full pleasure of society, without any remorse ensuing : and turn that part of our lives, in which too commonly our best inclinations wither away, and many bad ones take deep root, into a continual exercise of benefiting our fellow-creatures, and advancing ourselves in the favour of our Maker. For, to any one thus disposed, numberless opportunities would occur, at such times, of *communication, which is good to the use of edifying and ministering grace unto the hearers :†* Opportunities of making religion and morals look chearful and amiable ; of insinuating seasonable advice ; of softening rugged tempers ; of confirming right resolutions, and putting wrong beha-

* 2 Kings ii. 21. James iii. 11.

† Eph. iv. 29.

viour out of countenance. And in proportion as the natural or acquired abilities of men are greater, or their rank secures to them more regard, the more extensively serviceable they may be in this way. But where all these advantages meet together in an eminent degree, it is inexpressible, what blessings to mankind they, who enjoy them, might be, would they but use them well. For then, not only the busier part of their time would be spent in promoting piety and virtue, prudence and happiness; but their most disengaged and freest hours become seasons of delightful improvement to all about them: in which, imitating the kindly influences of heaven, *their doctrine would drop as the rain, their speech distil as the dew: as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.**

* Deut. xxxii. 2.

S E R M O N XI.

MATTH. xiii. 16.

BUT BLESSED ARE YOUR EYES, FOR THEY SEE ; AND
YOUR EARS, FOR THEY HEAR.

OUR Saviour, in the parable of the sower, which occasioned these words, compares the reception of his doctrine in the hearts of men to that of seed in different sorts of ground. Some are like the highway, beaten and hard, an open thoroughfare to all comers and goers : there it lies loose on the surface, and is immediately crushed under foot, or *devoured by the fowls of the air* ; the very first suggestion of the devil, the world, or the flesh, destroys at once the effect of all the instruction in their duty that is given them. Others resemble a light, but shallow soil, with a rock underneath : where the seed quickly springs up, but is quickly also scorched and withered. They are glad to believe, and forward to profess, what promises the favour of God and future happiness ; but impenetrable to all attempts of a thorough change within : bad inclination resists firmly at the bottom, while external performances make a specious appearance to the eye. Whenever the time comes, that they are to suffer or lose any thing for doing their duty, this is much too difficult a service for them ; they have no root sufficient to furnish them with strength to bear it ; they are burnt up, and shrivel away to nothing. In a third sort, the seed of the word takes deeper hold, and

makes very strong and promising shoots: but thorns and bad weeds, the earlier possessors of the field, rise up and choak it. For these grow of themselves: but it requires culture, and watchfulness to root them out: instead of which, too many plant them in the midst of the corn, intangle themselves, without need, in the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, which they heedlessly indulge, till every better principle is weakened, overshadowed and smothered. But still there remains a fourth sort, *who, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit;** yet very unequally, *some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty.*

The persons to whom this doctrine was delivered, gave immediate proof of its truth. The generality, fond of the shew of religion, but dreading to undertake the practice of it in earnest, *hearing heard not, and seeing saw not,*† to any useful purpose, what in this form of speech of our Saviour laid before them: as indeed he declares he knew would be their case, and therefore designedly used a manner of expression, which they would not take the trouble, small as it was, to understand.‡ For such neither deserved plainer instructions, nor would have made any other than a bad use of them; which could only have increased their guilt. Nay, his disciples themselves apprehended his meaning, though obvious enough, but imperfectly; and desired to have it explained to them.§ This however shewed a good disposition: and therefore he not only condescends to their request, but assures them it was a happiness unspeakable to have any degree of proper attention to, and serious sense of, a thing so infinitely important, as God's word. *Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear.* A

* Luke viii. 15. † Matth. xiii. 14. ‡ Ib. § Luke viii. 9.

truth, which, though applicable more eminently, beyond comparison, to those who heard and saw the Word of Life himself, yet must hold in proportion of all, who are taught by the ministry of his servants, the Christian doctrine. This passage then asserts in a strong manner the benefit of religious instruction: which many appear, unhappily for themselves and others, to undervalue exceedingly.

Indeed we are all very apt to overlook and slight the advantages, that we have long enjoyed without interruption, even in our worldly affairs. Health and plenty, safety and liberty, excite in us very little thankfulness: but the things of another, and, we imagine, distant life, make a still fainter impression. Hence great numbers thoughtlessly disregard religion: and some avowedly disbelieve it. No wonder, if many of these think teaching it needless, or even hurtful. But others also, who profess to scknowledge the duties, that we owe to our Creator, of a sober, and righteous, and godly life; yet maintain, that in goodness, nay justice, he is bound to make them, and in fact hath made them all, so evident by nature to every man, that we want no farther information to know the whole of them. But how do they prove this? The goodness of God is extended to his various creatures in degrees extremely different; and none is entitled to claim this degree or that. The justice of God permits him to give as low capacities to men as he pleases; and binds him only to require, in proportion to what he gives. Why then may he not put us under a necessity of learning from each other, in a great measure, the way to future happiness, as well as the methods of procuring to ourselves the conveniencies and necessities of common life? Should we not be wretchedly furnished with these, indeed should we be able to subsist, were

each generation, each man, to provide them for his own use, without being previously taught? * And must we not have been much more at a loss in matters of a moral and spiritual nature? We are endued with reason; but we should apply it very little, if at all, to subjects of this kind; and make a very slow progress in them, if we did; unless education, that is, instruction, opened the way, and directed our steps. We have an inbred sense of good and evil, which enables us, in many things, *of ourselves to judge what is right.* † But then, however it comes to pass, which our boasted faculties will scarce be able to tell us, this moral perception is by no means perfect or distinct; and it is mixed with passions and appetites, far livelier and stronger, that frequently obscure, and sometimes pervert it. Still in fact, the duties of life seem plain to most of us: and so we are tempted to conclude, there is no occasion for instruction in them. But how came they to be thus plain? Why, principally because we have always had instruction. Consider those nations that have little: for none are intirely destitute; every where parents teach their children, and all men teach one another, something: but still is the whole of their duty plain to them? There are doubtless parts of it, which they cannot well avoid understanding: and they might, with all their disadvantages, understand more than they do: but can they every one of them, with ease find out the whole? How dreadful a condemnation must they, who affirm this, pass on millions at once, for having found out so little? We Christians are more charitable, and think their darkness, though not

* Neque tam est acris acies in naturis hominum & ingeniis, ut res tantas quisquam, nisi monstratas, possit videre; neque tanta tamen in rebus obscuritas, ut eas non penitus acri vir ingenio cernat, si modo aspexerit. Cic. de Or. l. 3. § 31.

† Luke xii. 57.

a justification, yet a considerable excuse : but then we must insist that light would be a great blessing to them, and that instruction is necessary to introduce it. For what wretched ignorance of most evident, and what strange belief of most absurd, things, in religion and morals, doth all history shew to have prevailed, for successive ages, through nations, knowing and learned in other respects, but untaught in this ?

Nay, to look no farther than ourselves : how many do we see of low capacity, that, with the best help, know little, and, with less, would scarce know any thing ? How many of better capacity want leisure from worldly cares, and would have no time for improvement, if the frequent return of this day did not give it them ? How many, even with leisure, would never turn their minds to the consideration of their duty, if they were not called to it so loudly here, and knowledge in a manner forced upon them ? How many indeed, of higher rank as well as lower, appear after all very poorly grounded in the most important principles and precepts ?

It must be considered too, that our own reason, had we ever so much of it, and ever so much time and inclination to use it, cannot teach us all that we are concerned to know ; but there are doctrines of the greatest moment to fallen creatures, as we are, to be learnt from revelation. Nor is it sufficient, that each man study these in the Bible for himself. God hath expressly provided, that some shall instruct others in them. Books, written in distant countries and ages, cannot be intelligible otherwise. And several very interesting parts of Scripture are plainly such, that were most men asked, as the Eunuch was by Philip, *Understandest thou what thou readest ?* they must an-

swer, as he did, *How can I, except some man should guide me?** And well may they admit such guides, as desire to lead them, only by proving that the way is right.

But further: were every single dictate, both of reason and revelation, ever so easy to be understood; yet the number of them, arising from the various relations, in which we stand to our Maker and our fellow-creatures, is much too great to afford any hope of their being all distinctly apprehended by all, unless it be made the business of some, to point them out to the rest. Or though we could each, of ourselves, form a general notion of the whole: yet particular circumstances often perplex a general duty; and raise considerable doubts, what ought to be done; where still it is of great consequence to do right. The very wisest frequently need advice in such cases: much more then must it be of standing use to others.

Besides: what is in itself extremely evident may appear, to a prejudiced mind, uncertain or absurd. And it is very common for men to be prejudiced greatly against plain truths; sometimes through ignorance or weakness; but much oftener, that wrong belief may quiet them in wrong practice. No one indeed can directly believe what he will, merely because he will: but many have strange arts of misrepresenting things, and putting fair masks upon foul errors; which public instruction is excellently fitted to pull off; and preserve all, who are not obstinate in cheating themselves, from final ruin. Minds that have a wrong bias, if suffered to proceed without contradiction, would mould their religion into almost any shape they pleased: and great numbers of well mean-

* Acts viii. 30, 31.

ing persons would either fall of their own accord, or be led by others into childish and hurtful superstitions. For human nature hath always been found exceeding prone to them : and the preaching of the Gospel in its purity is the safest and most effectual preservative against them. But it is not superstition, or enthusiasm alone, that endangers the welfare of mankind, whatever some would have us think. These undoubtedly may be pernicious : but profaneness and profligateness must : which in all ages have been too generally practised, but in ours are openly defended. Such a situation of things makes it doubly necessary, that religion and virtue should have a full hearing. Whoever barely wishes well to civil society, cannot fail to be in some degree concerned for their support. And whoever is in earnest a Christian, will think it of the highest importance, to the future as well as present happiness of men, that the arguments for our holy faith be proposed to the world in their genuine force ; the objections, which may cause uneasiness to good minds, and furnish matter of triumph to bad ones, answered ; and the disingenuous artifices of unbelievers exposed.

But making known to us what we have to do, to hope and to fear, is only the first advantage of religious instruction. Though we every one of us knew it completely already ; yet unless we always recollected it too, as often as there was need, and were influenced by it, frequent admonition would still continue extremely useful. Very often the most acknowledged truths are the least regarded. They are so familiar to us, that they have no effect, but when placing them in a stronger light awakens us into a distincter attention to them. But especially what affords us no pleasure, as our duty too seldom doth, we are very apt to pass over as slightly, as

possible. The world attracts our eye with a vast variety of objects, infinitely more agreeable: to these we give up our whole souls, and are totally lost in vehement pursuits or vain amusements. The serious consideration, what we ought to do in life; and what will follow, if we do it not; seldom presents itself to us, and is little encouraged, when it doth. If we think, it is of other matters: if we read, it is for other purposes: if we have friends, they will scarce look on it as their business to be more concerned for us, than we are for ourselves: or, if they were, often they dare not attempt to set us right; and too often they, who pass for such, are most artfully industrious to lead us wrong. Then, besides the multitudes of those who are almost absolutely inattentive to their duty, how many are there, who impose on themselves with flattering imaginations, that they perform it faithfully, when they do not: blind to faults and defects, that every one else discerns in them: proud of merely seeming, or merely superficial, good qualities; and having the *name* and shew of *living*, while indeed they *are dead*!* Now both the thoughtless and the presumptuous must be brought to a right sense of their condition, or they are ruined for ever: and what can be so likely to do this, as the voice of public instruction, crying loudly in their ears; calling the former from follies and vanities to the true business of life, and warning the latter against fatal self-deceit? Admonitions from this place confessedly are founded on such an authority, as warrants us in delivering them with a spirit and boldness, that men would not bear in private: and no part of our discourses being ever levelled at any one in particular, we can decently and inoffensively reprove, with whatever freedom is requisite, the errors

* Rev. iii. 1.

of all in general ; *shewing the people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.**

But, supposing men both acquainted with their duty, and attentive to their failures ; they may still have great need of being directed, what method to take in order to a reformation. Not every one, that desires to become good, any more than every one that desires to become healthy, knows the easiest and safest and speediest way to it. Here again therefore such, as have made it their study, may do great service : animating the dejected, confirming the doubtful, strengthening the weak : informing each, what particular dangers are in their circumstances most to be feared, and by what means to be avoided ; when to fly from temptation, when to stand their ground against it ; how to gain advantages, how to retrieve losses, how to bear up under tedious and severe trials ; and become, at length, in all things, more than conquerors. Few, it may be feared, are serious enough to think of these helps with the regard, which they deserve. But some, however, God be thanked, both see their usefulness, and have experienced it. Things of this nature, indeed, are often most effectually taught in private : but public instruction also, from time to time, enters far into the particulars of them : though it is, and ought to be, more usually employed in furnishing the more general means and motives to piety and virtue : opposing to the vehement passions that assault men, such lively representations, as every one cannot make to himself, of the reasonableness, the beauty, the excellency, the rewards of religion ; the absurdity, the deformity, the present mischiefs, the future punishments of sin : stripping each vice of its specious disguises, and refuting its plausible pretences :

* Is. lviii. 1.

administering consolation under the difficulties of duty, and the afflictions of life: and placing, in a strong light, both the glories and the terrors, that are *ready to be revealed*.*

Such are the natural benefits of religious instruction: and evidently none can be greater. If it answers its end but imperfectly, and hath often been abused to serve bad purposes: every good thing in the world is equally liable to the same charge. Against abuses, it is perhaps no where better guarded, than in this nation: nor hath ever been freer from them, than at this time. Imperfections will always be found in what men are to execute: and will in all cases be represented by many, as greater than they are. Particularly in the present, some will affect to shew their own wisdom, in censuring what the public wisdom hath appointed: some will revenge themselves, by condemning an institution, which must condemn the notions they advance, and the lives they lead: some will be prejudiced to its disadvantage by personal or party interests: and others will be provoked, by dislike of particular men, to hate the very office they sustain: or, by disapprobation of some parts of an establishment, to inveigh against the whole. And very commonly they who afford themselves the fewest opportunities of being acquainted with public instruction, are loudest in their complaints, of the wrong and wretched manner, in which it is given. Now a candid, or an upright man, would never think himself at liberty either to find faults without impartial examination, or to exaggerate those which he might apprehend he did find. And a good, or even a prudent man, far from laying too great a stress on accidental, or small defects and inconveniences, would labour to

* 1 Pet. i. 5.

conceal, unless it were in order to remedy, whatever appeared amiss, in a thing of such general usefulness. For, if teaching truth, and cautioning against error; if setting before men their duty, and their interest; if directing them how to succeed in their views, and how to escape dangers; if supporting them in a right course of action, and deterring them from a wrong one, be of service in any of our concerns; it must be of most service in the most important one of all, religion. And whoever hath need, either to be taught what he did not sufficiently know, or to be reminded of what he did not sufficiently consider; to be restrained from doing evil, or excited to do good; to be comforted under the afflictions of life, or encouraged against the fears of death; may certainly be the better, if he will, for the preaching of God's word. There are few, one should imagine, so perfect as not to have room left for receiving advantage from it, in some of these ways. And whoever conceives he is, cannot with any decency tell the world so; which in effect he doth, by staying away from it. At least, he cannot think the bulk of mankind hath attained to this height of knowledge and goodness: and therefore he ought to countenance, by his example, what may in all likelihood be of the greatest benefit to those amongst whom he lives; and, in proportion as it amends and improves them, will be of no small benefit to himself.

For, that instruction always hath had, and will have, a mighty influence on the belief and practice of men's duty, not only the nature of the thing, but the testimony of all history, sacred and profane, shews. Our first parents were instructed by their Creator. Had they not; how quick soever the improvements of a self-taught philosopher may be, when described from

mere imagination, yet reason and fact make it highly probable, that even had they continued innocent, they would have been very ignorant for a considerable time. But the entrance of sin must enfeeble and darken their understandings greatly: and had their knowledge of what they were to do, been ever so clear, yet, what they were to expect, and on what terms, when they had failed of doing it, must be so very obscure, that it was of the utmost importance for God to interpose and inform them; as we find in Scripture he did by the immediate notification of a Redeemer. Divine instruction therefore began religion; and human hath preserved it. Hence that honourable character, given to Abraham by God himself: *For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.** This pious care, for which he was distinguished, seems to have been falling into disregard amongst the other men of that age. And the consequence was, what it always will be. The separation of instruction from worship separated morals from piety: and, when this unnatural divorce brought them to be considered, as independent things, the obligations to virtue were fatally weakened, the notions of religion were greatly corrupted, and, in proportion as ignorance increased, wickedness and superstition prevailed.

Still there were, in the heathen world, persons very eminent for great and good qualities. And as no stated public instruction was established among them; † they are sometimes produced, as arguments against the need of it. But their number by no means appears to have been considerable. Less had been said of them, if the generality of their countrymen had been

* Gen. xviii. 19.
16, 22, 26.

† See Aug. de Civ. Dei, l. 2. c. 4, 6, 7,

like them ; and what is said, is delivered by authors, chiefly desirous of gaining honour to themselves, by drawing beautiful pictures of the merit of their heroes. Yet, after all, we find that merit, even according to the most favourable accounts of it, which heighten it far beyond truth,* mixed with great blemishes. Their piety, the first article of human duty, if they had any, (for several of their systems of philosophy were inconsistent with or unfavourable to it) was grossly idolatrous : their love of their country was greatly injurious to their neighbours ; especially those whom they were pleased to call barbarians : most of them were polluted with unlawful, some with unnatural, lusts : and none of them ever shewed that humility of heart, and deep sense of imperfection and sin, which belongs to the very best of human creatures. Still, shining accomplishments they undoubtedly had : but they had also generally private instructors at least, from whose lessons they might in a good measure derive them : or copied them, though not taught in form, from those, with whom they conversed. Or supposing the contrary ; in every science, in every common art, some few will make a great progress with small advantages for it ; but shall we conclude from thence, that any sort of knowledge can become general, without being generally taught ; and every one do what no one is exhorted, or assisted, to learn ? Besides, the original poverty and frugality, the accidental necessities and distresses, nay the unaccountable fashions and fancies of some countries and ages, have brought particular virtues into practice and high repute, and they have been greatly celebrated for them ; though deserving of the severest censure for their faults in other respects. And, bad as we are at present ; it would be doing us

* See Leland against Tindal, Introd. p. 46, &c.

great injustice, to prefer upon the whole, perhaps the best of the heathen times, but certainly the common run of them, to ours. The number is great in itself, though small in comparison, of such as infinitely excel, in piety, in benevolence, in purity of heart, the utmost perfection, to which men, without the grace of the Gospel, could attain. But not to insist on these, we are without question in general not only more rational in our devotions, but milder in our treatment of each other, and more regular in our conduct of ourselves. An impartial reader of the Greek and Roman authors, especially of such as lived in the times of which they speak, will easily see and acknowledge this. But were it otherwise, their wanting instruction, and our having it, cannot possibly be the reason, that we are inferior to them: but we, without it, should have been still much worse; and they, with it, still much better. Indeed, they were sensible, whatever we are, how great need they had of it: and accordingly the best of them, some after taking long journeys to inform themselves, made it their business to teach others, who applied to them, the wisest rules they could, for the conduct of life. But they plainly found, both their knowledge so imperfect, and their authority so insufficient; that they declared, of their own accord, what many now set themselves to deny; that interposition from above was requisite to inform and influence mankind.

This advantage the posterity of Abraham enjoyed. And though they did not receive from it near the good they might; as indeed we none of us ever do from any advantage; yet it produced, besides the more distinguished examples of piety and holiness, mentioned in Scripture, and doubtless many others, a considerable degree of national faith in the one true God, and obedience to his laws; which was not only a blessing to

that single country, but scattered some rays of light through all the people, that sat in darkness round them. And no sooner had they learnt from their captivity, inflicted on them for their neglect of the divine commands, to set up and carry on a more constant and extensive course of instruction, than they had done before, by *reading* and interpreting the Scriptures *every Sabbath day in the Synagogues** of every city ; than their inveterate, and till then incurable, disease of idolatry ceased from amongst them almost intirely ; and they preserved for many ages a more uniform regard to their duty, than they seem to have had, ever since they were a nation.

But at length, even this method of instruction being corrupted by the established dispensers of it, *the light itself became darkness.†* And then was the proper season for the great enlightener of the world to appear : who detected and condemned the abuses of this institution, placed the conduct of it in better hands, and forbad his followers for ever that blind submission to *the doctrines of men, which had made the commandments of God of no effect.‡* Nor did he only purify, but perfect it with inestimable additions of new knowledge : whence he tells his Apostles, immediately after the text : *Verily I say unto you, that many Prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.* After which, his concluding care was to provide, by due regulations, for the perpetual support of this ordinance ; and promise the ministers of it, that *he would be with them alway, even unto the end of the world.§* We are therefore not only to esteem it, as a

* Acts xv. 21.

† Matth. vi. 23.

‡ Matth. xv. 6, 9.

§ Matth. xxviii. 20.

prudent and useful thing ; but to reverence it, as the appointment of our Lord and Master ; and attend on it in faithful expectation of his blessing. For under whatever disadvantages of human weakness the Gospel is often preached, it is still *the power of God unto salvation*,* to all that hear it, as they ought. Nor can we hope, that he who *resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble*,† will give it those, who set up their own wisdom against that of heaven ; which hath expressly ordained *pastors and teachers, for the edifying of the body of Christ*.‡ And so effectually did this method, unassisted by human art or power, build up the church in spite of all opposition of every kind ; that, in a small compass of time, the Christian faith was diffused through the earth, drove atheism, idolatry and vice into corners, wherever it appeared ; and planted in their stead, rational piety, benevolent virtue, moral self-government, founded on the sure prospect of eternal felicity.

Happy would mankind have been, had the purity and good influence of this excellent doctrine been preserved, by a careful use of the means, that recommended it first. But, by degrees, preachers *handled the word of God deceitfully*,§ and hearers *turned away their ears from the truth unto fables* :|| Instruction was partly perverted, partly disused : error and superstition returned in a new form, and ignorance and wickedness again overspread the world. Once more, two centuries ago, the restoration of a preaching ministry restored truth and freedom amongst us : and keeping up a due respect for it, is our great security against the dreadful alternative of open profaneness and profligateness, or Popish darkness and tyranny : the for-

* Rom. i. 16.

† James iv. 6.

‡ Eph. iv. 11, 12.

§ 2 Cor. iv. 2.

|| 2 Tim. iv. 4.

mer of which evils, in all likelihood, if ever it prevails, will soon make way for the latter. And therefore religious instruction, which guards us at once against both, is a most important public good.

Its private advantage to particular persons seems indeed often to be small. Multitudes there are, as bad, notwithstanding it, as one can well imagine they would be without it: and for this reason some deny its benefit. But surely it is a strange objection against the usefulness of a medicine, that they who refuse to take it, or neglect to take it regularly, are never the better for it. Many despise and ridicule this institution; and yet from time to time gravely complain of the little good it doth, whilst they are diligently endeavouring, that it shall do still less. And of the rest of mankind, few attend it so constantly as they ought, and fewer still with a due degree of right disposition. Yet after all, the number made truly and inwardly religious and virtuous by it, is not contemptible; those that are amended in part, or kept back from being mischievously wicked, are very large: and in how much worse a condition we should quickly be, were it laid aside, is abundantly more easy to foresee, than safe to try. Too much trial indeed we have had already: more than enough to find, that as the contempt of God's word and worship increases, idleness, debauchery, dishonesty, spread through the generality of mankind: evils, which one should think every one is greatly concerned to prevent, but especially the upper part of the world, both for the sake of their inferiors and their own. How far the same bad consequences have taken place amongst themselves, might perhaps appear disrespectful to say: but we may surely beg, that they and all men would seriously consider, what one good effect they have ever observed to follow from disregarding the appointed

exercises of religion : in what better way the time, allotted for these exercises, is generally employed by those, who frequent them not ; and what harm could possibly follow, if, from obedience to the command of God, from a respect to public authority, from concern for public welfare, from tenderness for their own private reputation, and (may we not add ?) from hope of possibly receiving some little improvement too, they should prevail on themselves to spend at church, every week, a few of those hours, which they do not seem, on other occasions, to reckon so very precious. Doing this, and requiring those who depend on you to do it also, you cannot have occasion to regret very bitterly : omitting it, whatever you think now, perhaps you may, certainly you will, repent : God grant the time may come, before it is too late. Let us therefore now make this, amongst others, one trial of our spiritual state, whether *we have loved the habitation of God's house, the place where his honour dwelleth :** whether we *receive the word with all readiness of mind,†* and *desire the sincere milk of it, as St. Peter expresses himself, that we may grow thereby.‡* If not, let us stir up ourselves to the more constant and zealous practice of a duty, which the Apostle to the Hebrews enjoins as an indispensable one, even in the midst of severe persecutions : with whose words I conclude. *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, and provoke one another unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another : and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.§*

* Ps. xxvi. 8.

† Acts xvii. 11.

‡ 1 Pet. ii. 2.

§ Heb. x. 23, 24, 25.

S E R M O N XII.

LUKE viii. 18.

TAKE HEED THEREFORE HOW YE HEAR.

EVERY advantage, bestowed on us by Providence, is a trust, of which we must hereafter give account. The advantages, which tend more immediately to our improvement in piety and virtue, are a trust of the most important kind: and religious instruction holds a principal rank amongst these. Its nature is excellently fitted to do men good: the grace of God is ever ready to accompany it: and yet very frequently it fails of its end. Doubtless too often this is our fault, who are employed to dispense it. We do not preach, we do not live, as we should: may God be merciful to us and amend us: for heavy will be our condemnation, if we wilfully transgress, or supinely neglect, either part of our duty. But the word of God, even when delivered by unskilful and wicked hands, hath power enough to produce its effect, if received as it ought: and though delivered by the ablest and best, too commonly, for want of being so received, produces none. *Preachers of righteousness*, from the days of Noah* to this, have found their warnings in a great measure fruitless. Prophets, expressly commissioned from heaven, have been rejected or disregarded by those, to whom they were sent. Nay, the Son of God himself, as indeed his whole history, but especially his

* 2 Pet. ii. 5.

parable in this chapter shews, met with many, in whose hearts his doctrine either gained no reception, or soon withered away, or was choked with thorns; for a few, who brought forth good fruit, in a greater degree or a less. And if it was needful for him, who *spake as never man did*,* who confirmed his discourses by miracles, and adorned both by a life of perfect holiness, to bid his Apostles themselves *take heed, how they heard*: much more ought his ministers now to give his people the same caution, and they to observe it. You think, and very truly, that a great deal is incumbent on us: but do you consider, what is incumbent on yourselves? Our reasons to desire that our preaching may be successful, are very strong: but yours are yet stronger. If we fail of converting you, provided we endeavour it faithfully, we have *delivered our own souls*: but if you fail of being converted, you *die in your iniquity*.† The Gospel is *the savour of life or of death*,‡ to all that hear it. Those, who are careful to improve by it, God will bless with further improvements, those who are not, he will leave in his just judgment to grow worse and worse: or, to speak the language of our Saviour just after the text: *Whosoever hath, to him shall be given: and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have*.

Being therefore so deeply concerned in the matter, let us all consider, with what disposition of heart we ought to receive religious instruction.

I. And, in the first place, that we should hearken to it with attention, is exceedingly plain: for else both speaking and hearing are lost labour. And yet how many are there, who vouchsafe not even so much regard to the doctrine of salvation? Decency perhaps

* John vii. 46.

† Ezek. iii. 19.

‡ 2 Cor. ii. 16.

brings us hither : and a failure of making our appearance might be remarked to our disadvantage : but whether our minds are absent, cannot be so easily observed : and therefore about that, we are very indifferent. Or we come of course, without reflecting, what end is designed to be served by it : and, though our consciences would not let us stay away, yet we have never bethought ourselves, that being here without any care to become the wiser for it, amounts very nearly to the same thing. Most however have surely some general intention of minding what they are about : but in so weak a degree, that every suggestion of every kind overpowers it. Some set their hearts on the affairs, and some on the pleasures of life so intirely, that these objects croud in at the most improper times, and drive out all others. Too many have indulged an indolent thoughtlessness, till applying their minds in earnest to any thing is become extremely difficult and painful to them. Not a few are engaged so deeply in observation of what they see at church, that they have no room left for taking notice of what they hear. There are persons too, who have so much to say one to another, that they lose, and make those around them lose, much of what the preacher hath to say to them all. And frequent mutual informations, it seems, are of such importance and necessity to be communicated immediately, that even the duties of hearkening to God's word, in the lessons, and singing his praises in the psalms, must give way to them. But indeed the best disposed, and most considerate, are not so happy always, as to command their own thoughts. Our imaginations, however carefully checked, are too apt, on every occasion, to present us with a multiplicity of fancies and notions, quite foreign to the business we are upon : but never more so, than in the midst of our religious exercises. And when once

our minds are got loose ; an effect, which the least accident will produce ; then on they run from one thing to another, hanging together by some kind of whimsical connection, till we are carried we know not whither : and, if we try to recover ourselves, are often lost a second time in the very endeavour. Some degree of this is merely the weakness of our fallen condition : and some have by nature more of it than others : for which they have indeed cause to be sorry, yet not to think despondingly of their spiritual condition. But still, too much of it is commonly our own fault. We have taught ourselves to be so unsettled as we are, by indulging a languid indifference to the most interesting of all our concerns ; and perhaps too, by delighting in the vain amusement, which these roving ideas give us, at the most improper seasons. The cure of this bad habit is very difficult : and therefore our watchfulness against its growing upon us ought to be the greater ; and our attempts to root it out, more closely followed. We must beg of God pardon for our past neglects, and assistance for the time to come. We must imprint on our minds, beforehand, as deeply as ever we can, the importance of instruction in our duty : and come to it, with the most deliberate and firmest purpose of strict attention. We must call ourselves back immediately, when we find we are wandering : and, without staying at all to discover what it was, that led us off, return without delay to the subject before us. We must also make it a rule to recollect afterwards the principal things, that have been said to us. For not only this will tie us down to mind them the more, when they are spoken ; but minding them ever so much just then, will singly be of small benefit : we must think of them over and over at home, till we digest them into lasting nourishment ; and, as the Apostle directs, give

such *earnest heed to the things which we have heard*, that we may not, *at any time, let them slip.**

2. But hearing God's word with attention will probably do us no good, unless, in the second place, we hear it also without prejudice against it: for else we shall attend to it, only to find fault, invent objections, and so lead ourselves into error; which may be worse than ignorance. Now unreasonable partiality is blameworthy in all cases: but extremely so, when it operates to the disadvantage of religion. The doctrines of natural piety and morality are confessedly of the plainest and greatest use to the present peace and comfort, as well as the future happiness of mankind. And those which revelation hath added, illustrate, confirm and supply the defects of the former, in the most perfect degree. Prepossession therefore against either, is opposition to our own chief good, to that of the world in general: and every worthy, every prudent man, who at all understands what Christianity is, cannot but hearken to it with delight, and heartily wish to find it true; and when he is convinced it is, desire to have it constantly inculcated on himself and his fellow-creatures, throughout the earth. To vain and vicious minds indeed hearing it faithfully preached must give uneasiness. But still such preaching is the most real, the most seasonable and necessary kindness, that can be done them. Unwelcome truths will never be the less truths, but much the more dreadful, for their studying to disbelieve them. And therefore the wicked, beyond all others, are concerned, to take notice of the threatenings of the Gospel, lay hold on its mercies, and examine their lives by its precepts; whenever they know, or but suspect, they have acted wrong. Nay, suppose they have no suspicion of that sort, yet unpre-

Hebrews ii. 1.

judiced attention to the preaching of it can do them no harm ; and may do them more good, than they think of. We require no implicit submission to what we teach. We warn you against it. So far as our doctrine is discerned by your reason, or felt by your consciences, to be true ; or appears to stand on the testimony of God ; so far only believe us. *We speak as to wise men : judge ye what we say.** All that we ask is, judge uprightly. For prepossession hurries people to condemn, what they will not have patience to understand : they imagine articles of faith to be unintelligible, and rules of life to be unreasonable, without the least foundation : and alarm themselves and others with phantoms, the mere creatures of their own fancies.

But though irreligious prejudices always prevail too much : yet there are times, when fashion gives a more than ordinary countenance to them : when all, that would make a genteel figure, must throw aside the antiquated notions of learning their duty ; and think, or seem to think, ill or meanly of those who are to teach it. Now whether you have need to learn any thing which you did not know, or be reminded of any thing which you had forgotten, or be excited to any thing which you neglect, or dissuaded from any thing which you practise, I must leave to your own consciences. The word of God, the wisdom of all civilized nations, the judgment and experience of all wise men declare that every one hath need of these things. And as for us, whose business is to teach : paying us too much regard, we acknowledge, is a dangerous temptation to us ; and may do, and hath done, great harm to true religion, to virtue, to human society : but paying us too little, is full as likely to do harm. And we appeal to yourselves : which extreme are the

* 1 Cor. x. 15.

people of this land at present most inclined to? Certainly you ought to have your eyes open to our faults and imperfections; else they will increase: but you ought to consider at the same time, how difficult it is for any set of men, and for us in particular, to behave so unblameably, as we should. And indeed while we discharge our office with any good degree of faithfulness, the beneficial nature of it should methinks intitle us to some peculiar share of the good-will and candour of mankind. At least, no one should, either designedly or inconsiderately, make such harsh interpretations of what we say or do, as would be universally thought unjust, or uncharitable, with respect to any other men. For such treatment will not only injure us, but make us in a great measure useless to those under our care: which is a matter of public concern. They who are instructed or admonished by one, of whom they think amiss, let him lay before them ever so important truths, very seldom take much notice of them. Yet this is one prejudice against which you ought to guard with your best diligence. The Scribes and Pharisees were both ill men, and our Saviour's bitterest enemies: yet since they *sat in Moses' seat*, were the authorised instructors of the people, he commanded his disciples to *observe and do whatsoever duties they bade them*.* Ask your own hearts then, are you thus disposed in relation to every truth, which you hear from us; of whom, we hope, you have cause to entertain a somewhat better opinion, than of them?

But they, who have no general prejudice against religious instruction or the dispensers of it, have notwithstanding too often very blameable antipathies to particular subjects. Some are highly pleased, when we enlarge on points of faith: but hate to hear those

* Matth. xxiii. 2, 3.

of practice much enforced. Others are for practical discourses only : and forget, that faith is the necessary foundation of them ; and if it were not, that God hath the same right to our believing what he teaches, as to our doing what he requires. Some would have preaching consist wholly of moral doctrines ; and hold piety in contempt, as an useless enthusiastical thing : though both reason and Scripture say, it is *the first and great commandment*.* Others despise morality, as an inferior heathenish attainment : and think only the sublimer parts of religion should be taught : though the Apostle saith expressly, *I will that thou affirm constantly, that they, who have believed in God, be careful to maintain good works : these things are good and profitable unto men*.† Many will pay great attention to the gracious promises of the Gospel : but little or none to its laws and threatenings. Or, if they are willing we should dwell on some precepts, which not they, but their neighbours, transgress ; still they turn a deaf ear to all that can be said on others : and one would except his unjust gains, a second his vicious pleasures, a third his vain amusements, a fourth his ill-humour, a fifth his causeless separation, from being any proper matter of our animadversion. In short, with most hearers, some points are in such favour, that they can hardly be repeated too often, or carried too far : and others so unwelcome that, the very mention of them gives offence. They have not patience enough to discern the true state of the question : much less to observe the force of the arguments for it ; or consider the answers to their objections against it : but reject immediately with anger, whatever thwarts their inclination, or preconceived opinion : unmindful of the Prophet's

* Matth. xxii. 38.

† Tit. iii. 8.

reproof to the Jews of old : *This is a rebellious people, that will not hear the law of the Lord : which say to the seers, See not : and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits.** But however apt we are to think otherwise, both our business and our interest is, not to shut our eyes against instruction, but make use of the light it offers ; not to fence against conviction, but lay open our hearts to the impression of truth, be it ever so painful : *and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save our souls.†* For those duties, which we the least like to hear of, may be, and often are, the most needful to be inculcated upon us of all others. Those doctrines, of which we are the most firmly persuaded, may, for ought we know, unless we have examined them well, be great mistakes. And even supposing them true, yet attending only to one part of the truth, may lead us into error.

3. The third disposition, requisite in attending on the word of God, is seriousness of heart. There are many, who have no positive prejudices, founded on seeming arguments against it, but so thoughtless and giddy, that they slight it most surprisingly. At best, they look on what is delivered from hence, as something of course to be said, and not to be minded. But in their livelier moods they can divert themselves extremely with the most solemn exhortations ; and their gaiety is apt to rise the higher, the more earnestly their duty is pressed upon them. Now undoubtedly the exertion of a cheerful temper, when regulated by good sense and propriety, is very innocent, as well as agreeable. But to seek for matter of drollery in every thing : and dress up subjects of the utmost importance

* Is. xxx. 9, 10.

† James i. 21.

in ludicrous disguises, to delight ourselves and others with laughing at them, is the silliest affectation of wit, and the most dangerous kind of folly. Remember then: what your Maker enjoins, what your eternal happiness or misery depends on, is worthy of the most awful attention, even of the most sprightly mind: besides that the same levity, which inclines men to play thus with religious truths, usually disposes them to treat the weightiest affairs of common life with the same sort of sportful indiscretion, till at length *the end of that mirth is heaviness*,* even in this world.

Sometimes indeed want of serious regard to what we hear, may not seem altogether inexcusable. Subjects of the greatest moment may be handled so improperly, as to disgust even the well-meaning; and possibly raise contemptuous, instead of devout reflections. But as it must be a very wrong heart, that takes occasion to be thus moved, where none is given; so if much be given, which surely is not frequently the case, it cannot be a right heart, which dwells on such things only, or chiefly. Consider: here you come, in obedience to the appointment of God, to learn or recollect the doctrines and the precepts, that lead to salvation. One or more of them are accordingly laid before you and recommended to you: but unhappily with some peculiarity, it may be, of phrase or manner; some arguments not of the strongest, some irregularity of method, or want of liveliness or prudence; in short, some mixture or other of human infirmity. Ought these defects, be they ever so real, though possibly after all they are but imaginary, to change the important business you are upon, into an ill-natured

* Prov. xiv. 13.

amusement: and turn you aside, from the improvement of your own souls, to an idle criticism upon another man's performance? Or is it the concern of every one of us, to profit by all we can, supply what is wanting, add strength to what is weak; and pass lightly over the imperfections of our instructors, remembering our own?

But they, who by no means hear sermons with contempt, will yet be far from due seriousness, if they hear them only with curiosity. And this it may be feared is a very common case. We want to have some fashionable controversy discussed, some difficult passage of Scripture explained, some darling speculation enlarged on, some plausible hypothesis proposed: in a word something told us, that may prove a pleasing exercise of our understandings at the time, and a help to conversation afterwards. Discourses, of which we can make this use, we seldom think of putting to any better: of such as we cannot, we soon grow weary, and hearken impatiently after other *teachers having*, as the Apostle expresses it, *itching ears*.* Thus we pay most earnest attention to what we hear: and receive absolutely no good from it. For filling our heads, in this manner, is rather the way to corrupt our hearts, than to amend them. Learning and ingenuity are doubtless of great service in explaining, defending, and adorning religion. But still the things, which a serious man will chuse to have most insisted on in the pulpit, are those which he is most concerned to practise, and most liable to fail in, the plain common rules of a Christian life. There is nothing new perhaps in such discourses: nothing, but what you have often heard and well remember.

* 2 Tim. iv. 3.

But have you minded it as effectually as you ought? Searching into this may possibly be new enough to you; how agreeable, God and yourselves know best: but it is needful, without question. Repeating to you ever so often the precepts, which you are conscious you observe, will give you pleasure. And the more unpleasing the repetition of the rest is, the more necessary it will be. “This kind of preaching hath no entertainment in it.” Very true. But is it for entertainment that you come to the house of God? Such as do, must not take it amiss to be disappointed; but submit, instead of what they wish, to have what they want, given them; the knowledge of their duty, their sins, their Saviour, their grounds of hope, or fear in relation to eternity. At least, whatever they might like for themselves, they must permit others to *have the Gospel preached to them*.*

But supposing you are ever so desirous to hear sermons ever so proper: on what account do you desire it? Perhaps only to enjoy the satisfaction, which a well-composed discourse naturally affords. Your ear is gratified, your sentiments are enlivened, agreeable emotions of various kinds are excited. So the hearer is pleased, the speaker commended, and followed; but with no thought of practising one word he hath said. This is the turn of mind, so admirably described, many ages ago, by the prophet Ezekiel. *Son of Man, the children of thy people still are talking of thee† by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word, that cometh forth from the Lord. And*

* Matth. xi. 5.

† This is the marginal, and the right translation.

*they come and sit before thee as my people; and they hear thy words but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness; their worldly desires of whatever sort. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song, of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.** Religious instruction could never be appointed to give such empty, insignificant delight as this: nor doth it in the least attain its proper end, unless it influences men to forget the preacher, and think of themselves: unless it raises in them, not a superficial complacency, or an idle admiration; but an awful solicitude about their eternal welfare, and that a durable one.

Constitutional warmth of temper is often blown up into a pious flame, that goes out almost as suddenly, as it was kindled. Lively affections are experienced; excellent designs are formed; every thing promises wonderfully well for a time; and then sinks down into nothing. Or, it may be men are moved anew, and resolve anew, at every good sermon they hear: but they cool again long before the next, and bring no fruit to maturity. Now a life of religious feelings and intentions, with an irreligious failure of acting suitably to them, is not the life of a Christian, nor will it ever procure us the reward of one.

4. There still remains then a fourth requisite, without which, however attentive, impartial, and serious, we are, we shall fall short; but towards which

* Ezek. xxxiii. 30, 31, 32.

See an excellent discourse of Musonius the philosopher on this subject. A. Gell. l. 5. c. 1. See also Arr. Epict. l. 3. c. 23. And the character of Socrates's discourses given by Alcibiades on his own experience. Plat. Conviv. See also Seneca, Ep. 52.

all these qualities greatly contribute : and what that is, the Apostle plainly signifies to us, where he saith, *The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.** And the faith, that we must have, to make it profit us, is not a mere historical persuasion of the truth of the Gospel, though with this we are to begin ; but a deep sense of our need of God's mercy promised in it ; a thankful acceptance of the terms, on which that mercy is offered ; an humble reliance on a crucified Saviour for pardon, grace and strength ; with a firm dependance on having these blessings conveyed to us, through a right use of the means, which he hath ordained for that end ; his word, and sacraments, and prayer. Such *faith* indeed must *come by hearing* at first, as the Apostle hath observed.† But this is no objection against the necessity of exercising it afterwards, in order to hear as we ought : and exercising duly our present lower degree of it, is the only way to obtain a higher. Every one therefore, who desires benefit from religious instruction, must attend on it with humility of heart, as a fallen, sinful undeserving creature ; to whom it makes known a method of recovery, which of himself he could never have found out or imagined. He must *receive it*, when delivered conformably to Scripture, *not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God,‡* must labour to strengthen his conviction of these things. He must apply earnestly to Him whose gift faith is, for that *faith* in his Gospel, *which worketh by love.§* For when once we come to love our Maker, our Redeemer, our Sanc-

*Heb. iv. 2.

† 1 Thess. ii. 13.

‡ Rom. x. 17.

§ Gal. v. 6.

tifier, we shall hear the very hardest parts of our duty with willing minds, and perform the whole with a cheerful and persevering zeal: till which time, all remains imperfect and ineffectual. Every attainment that comes short of uniform universal obedience, however specious it be, leaves us in effect very nearly, if not quite where we were. St. James's comparison is perfectly just. *Be ye doers of the Word: and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer; he is like unto a man, beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way: and straitway forgetteth what manner of man he was.** Yet this too plainly appears to be the common method. A great part, even of those, who come to hear from a principle of conscience, such as it is, mind exceedingly little at the time, reflect less afterwards, and continue just the same men they were before. They wonder indeed, that their neighbours take no more notice of what is said; and can even wrest passages in sermons to meanings, which they were never intended to have, and are scarce, if at all capable of, in order to point them against the faults of others; while they think not in the least of correcting their own, be they ever so plainly described: as if religion were made for every one else to practise, but themselves. It would really seem quite impossible, if daily experience did not shew it, that men could be told so plainly, and warned so frequently of transgressions and follies, which they cannot deny to be such, by which often they not only do great harm, but suffer great uneasiness, in this world, and which they are sensible

* James i. 22, 23, 24.

must bring on them, if not forsaken, the heaviest vengeance of God in the next; yet sit all the while as unconcerned, as if the discourse were about some perfectly indifferent matter; and go away at last, without so much as a single thought of ever changing their conduct. Or if they do think of reforming, it is at some distant time; like Felix, *when they have a convenient season*;* and this they look on as a very pious intention: whereas indeed it is only determining to live on wickedly for the present, and leave off they know not when. Or they resolve from henceforward to perform some parts of their duty, the more easy, or profitable, or fashionable, perhaps: but neglect the rest, as much as ever. Or they go farther, and will break loose from all their sins: but they will not avoid those temptations, that must in all likelihood bring them back soon into their former bondage; nor make use of those means, that would *preserve* them from it. Thus one way or other, they contrive to *hear the Word and not to do it*: and all they get by this artful management, as St. James, in the passage abovementioned, hath excellently observed, is *deceiving their own selves*. For God we can never deceive; men we very seldom do; nay even ourselves, for the most part, we are able to cheat but poorly; and could we succeed in it as completely, as we wish, we should be only the more irretrievably ruined.

Take heed therefore, how ye hear: and begin your care with considering so seriously, and improving so faithfully, what hath been delivered to you for that purpose now, that you may reap the truest and utmost advantage you can, from what-

* Acts xxiv. 25.

ever shall be any where taught you hereafter. *Laying aside all malice, and all guile and hypocrisy, as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby:** grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: to Him be glory, both now and for ever. Amen.†

* 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2.

† 2 Pet. iii. 18.

S E R M O N XIII.

PHIL. iv. 8.

FINALLY, BRETHREN, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE TRUE,
 WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE HONEST, WHATSOEVER THINGS
 ARE JUST, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE PURE, WHATSOEVER
 THINGS ARE LOVELY, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE
 OF GOOD REPORT ; IF THERE BE ANY VIRTUE, AND
 IF THERE BE ANY PRAISE, THINK ON THESE THINGS.

AS the excellent characters of the first believers and teachers of Christianity are in general a strong recommendation of it to mankind ; so that of St. Paul in particular shines with distinguished lustre through his whole history ; but especially his Epistles, the faithful pictures of his soul. Even in this short one to the Philippians, it is surprising to observe, how great a variety of most exalted and engaging virtues he shews. The authority of the Apostle is so perfectly tempered with the condescension of the Fellow-Christian : the expressions of his tenderness for those to whom he writes are so indearing and instructive at the same time : his acknowledgments of their kindnesses to him, so equally full of dignity, humility and disinterestedness : his mention of his past persecutions is so mild ; and of his present danger, (for he wrote from a prison) so cheerful : his attention to the supporting of their courage is so affecting ; and his confidence, that both he and they should persevere and

conquer, is so noble, and yet so modest : his deliberation, whether life or death be eligible, is so calm ; and his preference to live, even in misery, for their sakes and that of the Gospel, is so genuinely heroic, yet fully equalled by the composed and triumphant mention, which he elsewhere makes, of his approaching martyrdom : his zeal for propagating religion is so ardent ; yet attended with so deep a concern, that it be indeed true religion : he is so earnest to guard them, both against a superstitious reliance on outward observances and a licentious abuse of the doctrines of faith and grace ; so solicitous to improve them in rational piety, and meek beneficent virtue ; so intent to fix their minds on every thing worthy and amiable, and raise them above every thing gloomy or anxious ; his warmth in this glorious cause, is so far from being affected or forced ; and every expression so evidently flows from a heart, which cannot help overflowing, that whoever shall read but this one epistle with attention and fairness, under all the disadvantages of a translation made word for word, and broken into short verses, will feel a strong impression on his mind, that the writer of it must have been an uncommonly great and good man ; every way deserving of the high rank, which he claims, of a commissioned servant of God, and incapable of claiming it falsely.

But besides being thus moved with the admirable spirit expressed, and the sublime precepts diffused, throughout the whole ; it will be still a new subject of esteem and wonder ; to see the force and substance of them all collected at last into one brief exhortation ; comprehending in so narrow a space, the intire compass of virtuous dispositions, and right behaviour, as is done in the text : to which he subjoins with conscious boldness, appealing to all which *they had learned, and*

*received, and heard and seen of him,** that this had been his own disposition and behaviour ; yet humbly considers himself as *not having already attained or being already perfect*, but merely as *pressing towards the mark of the prize of the high calling of God ;†* and not only uses his own *prayers*, but begs *theirs* also, that, *through the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ*, all things may *turn to his salvation.‡* We cannot help honouring such a character : but, if we hope to be the better for it, we must also imitate it. And therefore let us examine with this view, that description of it which I have read to you. Had the several phrases, used in it, been as nearly as possible equivalent, and accumulated only to convey the intended meaning more fully and strongly, this would have been warranted by the example of the great Roman orator : who professes to have done the same thing on a like occasion.§ But there is a superior accuracy and beauty in the words of the Apostle. Each of them singly hath a distinct sense : and joined together they form a connected and complete body of duty, as will appear by examining them separately : which I shall therefore do in the first place ; and then, secondly, make a general observation upon the whole.

Truth, always present to the mind of God, is the ground of his commands ; and, so far as discerned by us, is the ground of our obedience. On this accordingly the Apostle here builds, and lays for the foundation of his whole superstructure, *Whatsoever things*

* Phil. iv. 9.

† Phil. iii. 13, 14.

‡ Phil. i. 19, 20.

§ Nihil enim habet præstantius [natura], nihil quod magis expetat, quam honestatem, quam laudem, quam dignitatem, quam decus. Hisce ego pluribus, nōminibus unam rem declarari volo : sed utor, ut quam maxime significem, pluribus. Cic. Tusc. Disp. l. ii. c. 20.

See also A. Gell. l. xiii. c. 24. where several instances of this manner of speaking are given, and reasons for it alledged ; and Cic. De N. D. l. ii. § 7. and De Fin. l. iii. c. 4.

are true : that is, conformable to the clear perceptions of our understandings, the inward feelings of our hearts, the known circumstances of our situation. Setting out thus, he excludes, in the first word, from being any part of Christian duty, every thing romantic and visionary, all refinements of false honour, all enthusiasm of a heated fancy. But he enjoins at the same time, whatever is reasonable and right ; be the practice or notions of the world as contrary to it, as they will : whatever the sovereign principle of conscience dictates, though passions and appetites may draw powerfully another way ; whatever the impartial state of any case requires, let vanity or interest make ever so much against it : what we owe to our Maker, no less than what is due to our fellow-creatures : what divine revelation teaches, no less than what human faculties discover : what the future as well as the present condition of our being demands. For our relations to God are as real, and infinitely more important, than to man ; those parts of his will which only Scripture makes known, the authority of Scripture being proved, are intitled to equal attention with those which reason dictates of itself : and such consequences of our actions, as will follow beyond the grave, are but a single and a short step more distant, than the visible and daily ones that follow them here. These maxims are the solid basis of proper conduct : the whole creation cannot shake them ; and every otherscheme of life is built upon the sand, and will crush us under its ruins. God himself proceeds invariably according to the reason of things ; he must therefore expect man to hold it sacred ; and both the honour of his government and the holiness of his nature stand engaged, that, sooner or later, every one shall find his account in observing this rule, but none in transgress-

ing it. *For his righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and his law is the truth.**

The second head of the Apostle's injunction is, *Whatsoever things are honest*: or rather, as the marginal translation hath it, *venerable*, intitled to respect: for so the original word in the Greek confessedly signifies, as indeed the word *honest* itself doth in the Latin tongue, from whence it is derived into ours.

If, pursuant to the former direction, we consider, according to truth, the inward frame of our hearts and minds, we shall perceive, that, as man was created at first in the image of God, so there still remains in our nature, however defaced by the fall, a sense of dignity and worth which we ought to reverence in ourselves and others. The lowest of men, with reason, think falsehood and dishonesty beneath them; and the highest, if they condescend to use them, lose, by so doing, a much truer greatness than they retain. Worldly advantages leave the possessors of them but just the same men, which they would have been without them. Personal accomplishments as often produce wrong conduct, hatred, contempt and misery, as they do the contrary. At best, neither the one nor the other can give more, than a short-lived, and precarious distinction. But scorn of wickedness, and esteem of our duty, shewn in practice, this is the valuable pre-eminence, which will continue an ornament to us through every condition of life, through every period of our existence; will intitle us to inward veneration, as well as outward regard, and recommend us, not only to fallible beings, but to the unerring searcher of our hearts, and final rewarder of our deeds. Whoever therefore would obtain a truly honourable character, must preserve himself above dishonourable actions;

* Psalm cxix. 142.

and never permit either profit, or pleasure, or favour, or power, titular pre-eminences, or popular opinion, to debase him into doing any thing ill.

Keeping up this kind of superiority to the height carries no pride in it, no temptation to pride. For, though a worthy-minded man knows every thing to be mean in comparison of right behaviour ; yet he must know too, that his own behaviour is very imperfectly right, even in the sight of men, much more of God : and were it completely so, it would still amount to no more than his bounden duty. He will therefore always proceed with great humility, though with great steadiness, in the discharge of his conscience : patiently expecting, what he will certainly find, that many other things, and some of them very bad ones, will greatly out-shine, in the eyes of the world, so plain and unpliant a qualification, as this, of uniform uprightness : which yet is indeed beyond all others the respectable one : the only ground of conscious self-approbation, of mutual esteem, and trust, of public order and safety.

For, however common it is become to treat all pretence of principle, as mere hypocrisy ; and both to give with great gaiety, and receive with great complacency, intimations, which one should think could do neither side much credit, as if interest or inclination would induce them, or any one, to do almost any thing ; yet such general representations are both false in themselves, and pernicious to human society. The worst of men are not thoroughly bad, without some mixture of good. But nothing can go farther towards making all men so, than treating it as an acknowledged point, that they are so already, and cannot be otherwise. In proportion as this doctrine prevails, no guilt will be out of countenance. Now what the consequences of that must be, is easily discerned ; and the prophet hath told

us very plainly: *Were they ashamed, when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall—At the time that I visit them, they shall be cast down, saith the Lord* *. Undoubtedly the wickedness of mankind is great: and those in high stations have particular opportunities of seeing it in a strong light. But still, they, who feel any good qualities in themselves, cannot justly think, there are none in others. And be there ever so little probity in the world, it is our most serious interest, to cultivate and increase it. For what comfort, or what safety, can there be in the midst only of the profligate and abandoned? Or how shall either authority or merit support itself, if that inward reverence of duty and worth be worn out of the minds of men, without which all the solemnities of external forms will soon come to lose their influence? But if earthly tranquillity could be preserved by other means: yet heavenly happiness can be enjoyed only by souls exalted to a capacity of it; purged from every thing mean and base, and, by generous and honourable dispositions, *made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light.* †

The third branch of the Apostle's exhortation, *Whatever things are just*, is naturally connected with the second. Had we nothing superior in our nature to restrain us, force and fraud would be as allowable between man and man, as between brute and brute. But the consciousness which we have of peculiar dignity, includes the obligation to mutual justice, as part of itself, and yet there was need to mention this part separately; because else, the higher the notion which each entertained of his own value, the more apt he might be to overlook others, especially his inferiors, and trample upon them care-

* Jer. vi 15.

† Col. i. 12.

lessly. Therefore St. Paul, in the text, immediately subjects the mutual behaviour of all the sons of men to one common measure ; and requires, that the highest and the lowest should each treat the other, as each might expect, were circumstances changed, the other should treat him ; which single precept observed would keep the world in quiet : and if it be transgressed, nothing is left to stop at, short of universal confusion. Every one therefore, in every part of social life, should be vigilant against the influence of pride, and passion, and interest : should inquire with diligence, and hear with candour, in order to judge with impartiality : should remember, that nothing is truly justice, but what is equity at the same time : should do frankly and immediately what he knows he ought to do : and so temper his prudence with innocence, as always to prefer harmlessness to worldly wisdom, whenever they interfere. That others will act very differently, is so much the worse for them : but no consideration for us to be moved by, in the least. The whole we have to be concerned for, is to act right ourselves. A wise and good God will take care of the rest.

Next to justice, the Apostle ranks, in the fourth place, a virtue equally flowing from the dignity of human nature, and seldom violated without grievous injustice, that of shunning the pollution of criminal pleasures, and practising *whatsoever things are pure*. Some kinds of sensual excess, as gluttony and drunkenness, are acknowledged to be contemptible, hateful vices. And however favourably too many look on the free indulgence of another appetite, at least in one sex, yet their opinion cannot alter the nature of things. Irregular gratifications must still remain what they are, dishonourable to our reason, destructive to our happiness. And it is surprizing, that they, who have any

rightness of mind, can fail either to discern or to reflect, what meanness it is to make these things the business of their being ; and associate, for the sake of them, with the profligate and abandoned : what imprudence, to ruin or to hazard their healths, fortunes, or reputations, in such wretched courses ; and what mischief, to destroy the virtue and peace of the innocent, and harden the guilty in their crimes ; to violate faith and honour, distress families, embitter the nearest and tenderest relations of life, confound descents and inheritances, extend infamy, and perhaps diseases also, to successive generations. Indeed the sins of this kind have not always all these bad effects : but they undeniably produce in general, by innumerable ways, more thorough wickedness, and more exquisite misery, than almost any others. And even those transgressions of purity, that may seem the least hurtful, are so wrong in themselves, and so contrary to the good order, strength, and welfare of society ; they lead on so naturally to worse ; they set so dangerous an example, and give so plausible an excuse to others, for going a little and a little farther in the same way, (as indeed there is no possible ground to make a sure stand upon, if once we depart from strict virtue) ; that whoever considers, will be far from thinking, either the precepts, or the threatenings of Scripture, on this head, too rigid and severe.

But abstaining from dishonourable, and injurious, and criminally sensual, actions, is by no means sufficient, unless we are careful to do becoming, beneficent, and engaging ones ; or, in the Apostle's words, *whatsoever things are lovely* : which class of duties he hath put in the fifth place with great propriety. For the good-nature and agreeableness, required under this

head, is not to supply the room of the justice and purity required before ; nor can possibly make amends for the want of them ; but we must first resolve to be innocent, then study to be amiable. Now the two great branches of amiable conduct are those, on which the Gospel hath laid so peculiar a stress ; mildness in bearing injuries, and bounty in relieving necessities : one of them expressly made the condition of our being forgiven ; the other the foundation of our being rewarded.

But, besides these endearing virtues, the Apostle undoubtedly designed to enjoin every other act of a generous and disinterested, a candid and sympathizing, heart ; every instance of gentleness to the faults, and condescension to the weaknesses, of men ; moderation and humility in advantageous circumstances, and patient composedness in low and afflicted ones ; every ornamental, as well as more substantial, duty of life ; affability of conversation, obliging attentions, kind compliances ; whatever will make our common journey through the world mutually comfortable and pleasing, without making it dangerous ; and exhibit religion in its native cheerfulness, as a reasonable service paid to an infinitely good Being. For all these things are comprehended under the character of *lovely* ; and constitute a much more valuable part of Christian practice, than many seem to be aware of. Indeed piety and virtue, however unpolished, deserve high esteem ; and it would be a most unhappy mistake, to prefer superficial accomplishments before intrinsic worth. But still, both religion and morals, disguised under a forbidding look, appear so much less to advantage, than when they wear an inviting one ; that we wrong our

profession, as well as ourselves, if we neglect to shew it in as much beauty, as a modest simplicity will permit ; and thus to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.**

Nor is it enough to practise what we think right and worthy and becoming, but we ought further to respect, in a proper degree, what the rest of mankind esteem so. And therefore the Apostle adds in the sixth place, *Whatsoever things are of good report :* and places this head after the others ; because, if a competition arises, conscience is always to be preferred before common opinion. And indeed numberless are the poor wretches, who have been utterly ruined, by sacrificing at once their virtue and common sense to reigning sins and follies. Not that, in general, the public voice is nearly so favourable to wrong conduct, as some are willing to imagine. All, who are not guilty of it, we may be sure will disapprove it. Many who are, condemn it, even in themselves. Nay, such as encourage others in it, often censure them for it severely notwithstanding. Or, was every bad man true to his own bad cause, yet both their weight, and even their number, is less considerable, than they would have it thought. The gay and the loud, the bold and the forward, nay the great and the noble, however they fill the eye, are by no means the whole of the world : but there is reason on many accounts to look beyond these : and enquire, what the serious and considerate, what the generality and bulk of mankind, whom it is neither modest nor prudent to despise, will think of our conduct ; what hath been the judgment of time past on the like behaviour ; what is likely to be the judgment of time to come ; when we shall be spoken of without ceremony, and have the characters that we appear to

* Tit. ii. 10.

deserve, indelibly fixed on us : a matter about which we can not really be indifferent, though we may affect it.

Nor ought the opinion of mankind only to assist in deterring us from what we know to be wrong ; but restrain us from many things, that we possibly imagine very allowable. We may apprehend, perhaps, that such and such liberties have no harm in them. But if others, worthy of regard, apprehend they have ; may not we be mistaken as easily as they ? and is not the safer side the better ? or were we sure that we judge right, is there no deference owing, in point of decency, to the contrary judgment ? Especially if it be the general, the established one ? besides, may we not endanger duties of great importance, by destroying wantonly even the slighter outworks that defend them ? may not our transgressing what is commonly esteemed sacred, lead some to esteem nothing sacred ; and others to suspect, that we esteem nothing so ? Now this latter effect alone, or any thing that approaches towards it, would surely be very undesirable. And they, who have no concern what they are thought to be, are in danger of having but little concern what they do.

The Apostle, having thus recommended every thing that we can discover to be a law of life, and every thing accounted such by the wise and good, may seem now to have gone the utmost length that precept could go. But he had still one thing in reserve for the seventh and last place, to complete and crown the whole. Besides the constant obligations of all men, expressed hitherto ; some, indeed most, on one occasion or another, are qualified for actions of distinguished excellence, transcending the common measures of duty. And though none should aim at what is beyond his

strength, and all should first ground themselves thoroughly in things necessary, before they aspire farther; and ever beware of doing the least evil, to bring about the greatest good: yet, these precautions being observed, *If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise*; any singular opportunity for exerting superior goodness, and acquiring proportionable honour; to this also the Word of God, far from discountenancing an ambition so laudable, excites and encourages in the text. Here then every one is called forth, by the voice of Heaven, to every thing great and good, that shall at any time lie in his power: to serve his Creator, and benefit his fellow-creatures, the most eminently that he can, by all the means, that his knowledge and wealth, his example and persuasion, his influence and authority, can furnish out. And *blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.**

These then are the things, on which the Apostle directs us to think: and the general observation which I would make upon them, in the second place, is, that we cannot think of them in earnest, as enjoined by our religion, without honouring it highly, and being strongly moved by it to every part of right temper and right conduct. Such precepts evidently prove, that Christianity is not a contrivance to make men, by faith in speculations, and exactness in observances, happy in another world, without being good in the present. Articles of belief, and institutions of worship, are instruments only: proper indeed, and appointed ones: and we must never hope to be amended or accepted, unless we take the way to be so, which God hath marked out. But neither must we hope, that a formal use of the means will be sufficient, without serious

* Matth. xxiv. 46. Luke xii. 43.

care to attain the end. *Now the end of the commandment is charity, Love to God and man, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned;** which words express the very same temper with those in the text.

If then these be the things, which mankind have need to learn, and God expects; it should be remembered, that they are taught in perfection by the Scripture Revelation, and the methods of acquiring them too: that neither the one, nor the other, were ever taught, without revelation, either generally, or statedly, or without gross defects and errors: and that they, who reject this way of instruction and worship, have not pretended to substitute any other; but shewn, by neglecting the commands, and transgressing the restraints of natural religion, that their disregard to Christianity proceeds from bad motives; and will produce, in proportion as it increases and spreads, the very worst effects. Whoever, therefore, is indeed concerned for true virtue and moral piety, will affectionately esteem those incomparable lessons of each, which the Gospel affords him: and whoever hath at all a due sense, how very often he hath violated, on one occasion or another, the dictates of both, will rejoice from his heart in those assurances and means of forgiveness for what is past, and assistance in what is to come, with which nothing but the Gospel can bless him. For, however thoughtless offenders may flatter themselves, every considerate mind must see and feel, that sin deserves punishment, and repentance is not innocence; that pardon and grace are not debts, but voluntary favours; and God alone can inform his creatures with certainty, on what terms he will bestow them, and to what degree. Now he hath accordingly

* 1 Tim. i. 5.

informed us, that only faith in Christ, *working by love availeth any thing*,* and that shall intitle us to every thing.

But then faith is not mere belief; nor is love mere admiration, of the advantages and promises of the Gospel: but being moved by these to an uniform practice of its laws is the single evidence which proves their genuineness: and unhappily is the very attainment of which the generality of men fall short. Some there are, who retain the name of Christians, and seem to think it their due, though perhaps they scarce remember the time, when they performed any one act of Christian devotion, at least, in private. On public worship, it may be, or some part of it, they do attend sometimes, to save appearances, or in hope of entertainment, or from a confused notion of its being, they scarce know why, a duty; but without the least conception, almost, of any further difference, between having religion, and having none. Others, that make a conscience, such as it is, of part of what they are commanded, have no regard at all to the rest; but they will be pious without virtue, or virtuous without piety; or they will chuse just as they fancy, which of the laws of either they will obey, which they will not. Even the more truly good seldom think of aspiring to eminence of goodness: and they, who in many respects attain high perfection, often fail most unhappily, of adding the beauty of holiness to the reality of it, by an amiable and obliging deportment and conversation. Thus it comes to pass, that some despise religion, as useless; and others are disgusted with it, as harsh and disagreeable: that not a few of its professors will find it contribute only to their heavier condemnation; and many of those who are intitled to

* Gal. v. 6.

reward will obtain a much inferior reward to what they might have done ; and all owing to the neglect of thinking, as they ought, on the important virtues recommended in the text. We give much attention to low and transitory things ; too much it may be feared, to sinful and forbidden ones. We must know these excellent qualifications to be the worthiest objects of our thoughts : why should they not also be the most constantly present to them ? But suppose they were, it is of no more use to think with speculative delight on the precepts, than the privileges of the Gospel : but we must so consider both them and ourselves, as diligently to examine, and faithfully bring to account (for this the word *thinking on* strictly denotes in the original) our duty and our practice under each article ; and compute the goodness of our condition, not by the share that we possess either of the gay, or the solemn trifles, to which alone men commonly attend ; but solely by the result of this momentous inquiry, made with great impartiality, and with earnest prayer for the divine illumination. Nor will thinking on our spiritual state, merely enough to know it, benefit us ; without thinking effectually how to mend and improve it : by imploring God's pardon for every thing wrong, and ascribing to his grace every thing right in us ; and asking and using his future assistance, to withstand all temptation, and increase in all goodness. *These things, therefore, think on and do : and the God of peace shall be with you.**

* Phil. iv. 9.

S E R M O N XIV.

JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

AND IF IT SEEM EVIL UNTO YOU TO SERVE THE LORD, CHUSE YOU THIS DAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE: WHETHER THE GODS WHICH YOUR FATHERS SERVED, THAT WERE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FLOOD; OR THE GODS OF THE AMORITES, IN WHOSE LAND YE DWELL: BUT AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD.

THE Sovereign Disposer of all things, being resolved to destroy the inhabitants of the land of Canaan for their impious and barbarous idolatries and unnatural lusts, was pleased to make the Jews who were a much better, though far from a blameless, people, the instruments of their destruction, in order to warn them the more strongly against the like sins. Their leader in this awful work was Joshua: who after he had accomplished it, divided his conquests amongst them; and then having received, from the gratitude of the people, an inheritance in his own tribe,* no way considerable, which however was all that he asked; appears to have retired thither, and spent the rest of his days in an honourable privacy; leaving the administration of affairs, in time of peace, to the ordinary civil magistrates; till, finding his end approach he *gathered all Israel, and called for their elders, their heads, their judges and their officers†;*

* Josh. xix. 49, 50.

† Chap. xxiv. 1.

and they presented themselves before God. In this solemn assembly, the last he was to see, requesting nothing for himself or his posterity, but strictly following the example of Moses, who had in no respect exalted his own descendants above the rest of the people ; he expresses the strongest solicitude for what he knew the public happiness to depend on ; the preservation of true religion, and consequently of virtue, in opposition to the superstitious follies, and shocking vices, of the nations round them. To promote this end, the venerable Chief recounts to them, by the especial direction of Heaven, the miraculous and gracious dispensations of providence, which their fathers and they had experienced, and he had been so long a constant eye witness of ; concluding the history with their present happy condition : and his inference from the whole is, *Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him, in sincerity and in truth**. But being sensible that mankind are strangely apt not to think themselves in a good state, when they are in the best ; he proceeds to intreat them, that if any are dissatisfied with the fruits of observing their present religion and laws, they would consider well, under what other, upon the whole, they would wish to be ; for under some they must. They might, if they pleased, after all he had said, try a change, and take the consequences : but he had seen too much of the benefit of adhering to God, to have the least desire of experiencing what would be the effects of forsaking him ; and his prayer and his endeavour should be, that all under his influence might tread, for ever, in the same steps. *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you, this day, whom you will serve :—but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

In these words we have,

I. An intimation of the danger there is, that men may grow weary of true religion.

II. An admonition, that such would think seriously what they propose to exchange it for ; and what advantage they expect from thence.

III. The resolution which prudent men will make, whatever others do ; to continue in the practice of it themselves ; and preserve a conscientious regard to it amongst all that are placed under their inspection.

I. An intimation of the danger there is, that a great part of the world may grow weary of religion, even whilst it is taught in simplicity and truth.

Undoubtedly one of the strongest prejudices against it hath arisen from the absurd, and often hurtful mixtures, with which, from time to time, it hath been corrupted, either by mistaken or designing men. These have tempted many to reject the whole, good and bad promiscuously ; without separating what was of God from what was of man. Now, were every thing else to be treated in this manner, not one of the rightest principles of behaviour, or the most valuable blessings of life, could possibly escape. For what is there on earth, that hath not been frequently misunderstood, perverted and abused, both by weakness and wickedness ? It is therefore the grossest partiality, not to distinguish in the case of religion, when we do it in every other : indeed, not to be as zealous for every real part of it, (for they are all highly useful) as against the corruptions it hath unhappily undergone. And yet even in a country where it is the purest, some can allow themselves to talk, as if it were fraud and imposition throughout : can gratify their vanity, defend their vices, or serve their interests, by insisting

confidently on the most groundless and exploded objections ; sometimes against all reverence to Him who created them ; often against the revelation he hath made to them : nay, can slight it as entirely, without being acquainted with the shadow of an objection, as if they had the strongest in the world : think it a reason abundantly sufficient, that they see others of good figure do so ; and at last, perhaps, set themselves to make it their scorn, without having once considered in earnest, whether they ought not to have made it the rule and comfort of their lives.

This is going great lengths ; yet not absolutely the greatest of all. For it hath happened too commonly, that those very things, for which religion ought to be honoured most, have been the true causes of mens opposing and forsaking it. The Jews, for instance, were disgusted with theirs, because it was too spiritual and refined for them. We, indeed, who are blessed with one yet more so, may be tempted to find the contrary fault with that of Moses. But think what the worship of the world was at that time : worship of the sun, moon and stars ; brute beasts, stocks and stones : altars under every green tree, and upon every high hill ; ceremonies numberless, unmeaning, immodest, inhuman. How prodigious a reformation was it then, to introduce, instead of these mischievous absurdities, the adoration of one only invisible Being, the Maker of all things ! and the offering of sacrifices to him in one only temple upon earth ; with rites and observances, few in comparison, and directly pointed against idolatry and superstition ! But what was really the merit of their religion, was the ground of their clamour against it : *Make us Gods to go before us :** let us have deities, that we can see and feel, to carry along

* Exod .xxxii. 1, 23.

with us ; was the cry of the people : and whenever they forsook the Lord, it was for these more substantial objects of devotion. This may seem unaccountable enough ; and yet, amongst ourselves, converts are frequently made to a communion, one of whose chief recommendations must be, that it strikes the senses, with images and formalities, pomp and shew.

But, as some are prejudiced against true religion for being too rational ; many, it may be feared, are averse to it for being too moral. As long as piety can be made, in any shape, consistent with sin ; whether by trusting in faith without works, or substituting works of no value for those of real value ; or abounding in some one sort of duties, instead of honestly practising every sort ; so long it may be borne with. But if the teachers of it will assert and prove, and attempt to convince mankind, that no one can be pious, without being uniformly virtuous ; then there remains no possibility of compromising matters : but, if religion will give no quarter to vice, the vicious must give no quarter to religion : a very bad inducement, I own, but a very strong one ; and it deserves careful reflection, whether a principal reason, why Christianity is now, more than ever, disregarded, be not this ; that now, more than ever, since the primitive ages, it is so preached, as to leave no room for being godly and wicked at once. But, however this be, there appears, in general, but too much danger, indeed but too much experience, that men may be tired even of true religion ; that it may *seem evil unto them, to serve the Lord their God.* Therefore the text contains,

II. An admonition, that such, as are disposed to throw off the bonds of duty to their Maker, would think seriously, what sort of change they are about to venture upon, and how they hope to be gainers by it.

No other course, that they can take, so much as promises any good with respect to a future state: yet they must own there may be one: nay, if God be either just, or wise, or good, or true, there will; and if there be, it is the most important interest we have, or can have, to be happy in it: yet nothing but religion, provides against our being miserable in it. A consideration, which takes little time to express; but very few spend enough in thinking of it: for what are the poor pleasures of this short life, compared with the joys or the pains of eternity? But even as to the present world, how much freedom soever bad men may affect, some master they must serve; some restraints they must be under, and some mortifications they must go through. Consider the pursuits of the selfish and ambitious; are not they obliged to suppress their inclinations, and contradict their passions, in a thousand instances, to carry the single point of their worldly advantage? Consider the indulgences of the voluptuous and intemperate, the sallies and flights of the wild and extravagant; we are apt to say indeed, that they deny themselves nothing: but is it true? Are there not multitudes of things, that all of them wish for, and cannot have: and still greater multitudes, in proportion as they give their wishes a larger scope? Is any possible scheme of life to be carried on, without self-denial in some thing or other? Or, if men can, and will, do just as they please at first; what comes of it? Is it not the perpetual consequence, that they must suffer for it at last; and bear much the heavier burthen, after a time, because they set out with the resolution of bearing none?

If therefore every method, we can pitch on, hath at least, either its restraints, or its sufferings: and probably both: which are most reasonable? which are most beneficial? Those of religion and morals; or

those of the various masters, which, on departing from religion and morals, we must obey? It concerns us highly, in such a question, not to flatter ourselves and take things for granted; not to guess, and run the risque, but to examine and choose: whereas the misfortune is, men enter upon the course, and follow it their whole lives, without ever deliberately chusing it at all: *halting*, as the prophet expresses it, *between two opinions*,* whilst they proceed in one tenor of practice; and that, the wrong one. For the unsafe one is certainly the wrong: and, unless religion cannot be true, neither impiety, nor immorality, can be secure. Whoever therefore allows himself in either, ought before-hand to know very certainly, what is impossible to know (for we cannot know things to be true, which are false); first that nothing remains to be hoped or feared in another life: and then, that wickedness bids fairest for happiness in this.

Too many indeed appear to think the latter point, at least, a very clear one. But remember, the inquiry is, not merely, what will afford us most pleasure just at the present; or even for a few years; though it is seldom, that the vicious find reason to applaud their own conduct so long: but what will continue to please, what will give us the advantage upon the whole, taking inward satisfaction into the account, as well as outward gratifications; and not only delight us in the first and smallest part of the journey of life, but support us in the remainder, that needs it most; and enable us to conclude it with comfort and credit. That abandoned wickedness cannot do this, every one, who thinks and observes, must see; and they who do not, will soon feel. Some therefore contrive to take a middle way: indulge themselves beyond virtue, yet

* 1 Kings xviii. 21.

restrain themselves short of profligateness. And undoubtedly there would be less guilt in this, if it were not, that being so deliberately guilty is a great aggravation. There may also fewer worldly inconveniences follow from it : but still, if great deviations from duty lead to great mischiefs ; the smaller must, in proportion, lead to some. And besides, they, who intended to go but a little out of the way, are almost always either invited, or driven gradually farther and farther : and can never know before-hand, where they shall stop. Indeed what is there to stop them ? Desires multiply and strengthen. Duty is out of the question. Prudence grows accustomed to submit : perhaps falls low enough, to advise covering one sin with another. What now shall keep such persons back from any crime ? A principle of honour, it may possibly be said. And true honour, so far as it goes, is a noble principle indeed. It is uniform virtue, adorned with dignity of manners, with attention to every thing praiseworthy and amiable, and scorn of every thing base and mean ; judging what is so, by reason and truth, not vulgar opinion. But the false honour of the vicious is an airy phantom, changeable as fancy and fashion vary, that permits in multitudes of instances, and requires in some, the wickedest, the cruelest, the absurdest behaviour ; and sets men up for objects of respect, that have no one good quality, merely because they profess calling to account whoever shall fail of the regard they demand, or ascribe to them any bad quality, which they do not care to own. It can never be, that so wretched a counterfeit as this should be the guide of life. There is therefore none to be trusted to, if virtue be rejected ; and virtue without religion, neither is complete, nor will be effectual. If other superiors and benefactors are intitled to reverence, God

is. If outward expressions of reverence are to be shewn them, they are to be shown Him: both to preserve it alive in our own minds, and to spread it around us. And if any expressions of it are due, those which he hath appointed are due. Paying such regard to God, joined with attendance on proper instruction, must naturally produce a serious care to abstain from every thing injurious, to do every thing beneficial, in human life: as not only our indispensable obligation, but our most important interest. And what other motive can either extend so far, or influence so strongly? If then there be any need, that the world should grow better, or not grow worse; that men should live together innocently and usefully; have comfort under afflictions in this life, or look for eternal blessedness in the next; principles of piety must be encouraged. Nay, could we possibly be content to give up all these advantages, there would still remain other considerations of great weight on the same side. Though we may throw off religion so far as not to be governed by its precepts: we shall be made on that very account, from time to time, extremely uneasy by its threatenings: and the consequence of not obeying God as children, will be dreading him as criminals. What if here and there a few profess to have got over these fears? Perhaps inwardly they know the contrary; or, however, they come to know it when they least think of it; or, could they be sure never more to experience them on earth, they will too soon feel surer and greater torments in hell, for having thus wickedly hardened their hearts. But mankind in general cannot get over the fear of God. Some religion they must and will have: and the only question is, whether it shall be a good and true, or a false and bad one. Joshua therefore 'puts the matter to the

Jews in a perfectly just light : *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you whom you will serve : whether the Gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood ; or the Gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell.* It is true the Israelites were prone to superstition : we are inclined to profaneness ; and therefore may seem in no danger of the opposite extreme. But universal profaneness, and total unbelief, never subsisted long any where, and never will : the world could not bear it : and the human mind hath a natural bent the other way. You have seen this in the case of the Jews. What was that of the Gentiles when they forsook the truth ? That *because, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful ; they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened, till they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.**

We of the present age indeed cannot well go thus far at once : but by how easy steps may we come to it ! Were not our forefathers near it, but a little more than two hundred years ago : worshipping, with more zeal than they did their Maker, images of pretended saints, many of whom had lived and died great sinners, and addressing prayers to them in a language they did not understand ? Now the same high road, that of Popery, is open yet. And will not numbers be inclined to take it, if they can be persuaded, from what they see, that the profession of the Protestant religion is the direct way to the profession of no religion at all ? when public worship and instruction are once deserted, or attended on with visible indifference and contempt ; when

* Rom. i. 21—24.

persons are taught nothing, and guarded against nothing; will they not of course be in danger of every thing? And have we not seducers among us in every corner, trained up with the most artful subtlety, to work on the ignorance of some, the guilt of others, the private interest of a third sort; to lead them over unto a communion, that hath corrupted the notions of piety, and weakened the bonds of moral obligation; done infinite mischief to mankind by tyranny, perfidy and cruelty; and must be an eternal foe, whatever it may sometimes pretend, to that happy establishment of truth and liberty, which may God preserve to us and ours! Whoever therefore hath a dread of superstition, bigotry and slavery, should be zealous in the highest degree for pure religion, and if ever he would have his zeal effectual, must express it in the same manner, that we find in the

III^d part of the text, the Jewish chief did; by resolving, that, *whatever others do, he and his house will serve the Lord.*

Fear of singularity hath a most powerful influence on mankind: and, in matters nearly indifferent, it is very useful that it should. But in points of importance; our concern is, to act as we ought ourselves, let those around us act as they will: take all the innocent care we can, neither to provoke their anger nor contempt; but still do the right thing, and stand by it: preferring the testimony of our own hearts, that we deserve approbation, before receiving from men ever so much of it. But especially in religion, both reason and Scripture dictate this behaviour. And yet many, who can even affect to be singular in trifles and follies, have such a cowardly fear of being thought so in the case of seriously professing religion, where it would be truly honourable, and they would in fact be honoured

for it, perhaps even by their present acquaintance, or at least by better whom they might chuse, and by the world in general; that, to avoid this imagined evil, they will incur the most real ones, a guilty conscience in this world, and the wrath of their Maker in the next. If this be not contemptible weakness, what is? And if it be, serving the Lord, let ever so few do it, is true wisdom.

But then it must be observed, that, though every degree of genuine regard to God will produce to us proportionable benefits, and preserve us in some degree from sufferings; yet the life and immortality, promised in the Gospel, can be attained, and, where it is faithfully preached, eternal punishments can be avoided, only by obedience to the terms proposed in the Gospel. The doctrines, therefore, which God hath revealed there, plain or mysterious, must be received with humble faith; the duties he hath enjoined there, moral or positive, must be observed with pious reverence; and our hope of future happiness must be placed, not in the merit, either of our own good works, for without the grace of the Holy Spirit we cannot do any; or of our own repentance, for being sorry that we have sinned is not being innocent; but solely in the divine mercy through our blessed Redeemer, who died for us that we might live to him. And, how much soever these rules may be overlooked or despised in the world, yet he hath repeatedly assured us, with uncommon strength of expression, that our *not being ashamed of him and his words*, of which these are part, is an indispensable condition of his *not being ashamed of us at the great day*.*

But serving the Lord, as good Christians ourselves, is not sufficient, when we are intrusted with others also,

* Mark viii. 38.

Now, in some degree, we are intrusted with all who are placed under our influence, especially if they be under our authority too: and God, with justice, expects every one to do the good, which he hath given him abilities for doing: for, conferring them, is the highest honour he can bestow on his creatures; and using them, is the noblest way of at once obeying and resembling our Creator. But, not to exceed the limits of domestic life, to which the text points our view: parents are, by nature and Scripture, intrusted with their children: bound in conscience to endeavour, that the being, which they have given them, prove not a miserable one: bound in prudence to provide, that, when they grow up, they may be a comfort and a credit to them, not a shame and a curse. And yet, how commonly is the ornamental and superficial part of their education the only one attended to? Perhaps a slight form of catechetical instruction, and a prayer or two are learnt by rote, as a task in their childhood, for mere form's sake, and perhaps not: but, after that, very little care taken in teaching them rules of common prudence; less still in giving them any consistent principles of morals; none at all in binding them down to both, by a serious inward sense of religion; of the purity of God's law; their depravity, and need of a Redeemer and Sanctifier; the importance of Christ's ordinances, without which, nothing will be inwardly, or often outwardly, such as it ought: and then, at last, either great surprize and anger is expressed, at their coming out, what it must be expected they should: or else their ruin is stupidly acquiesced in, as unavoidable from the beginning: and men sit down contented, that they who are nearest, and ought to be dearest to them, shall be wicked, and wretched, and

despicable ; or, however they escape here, undone to eternity.

But, not only our children should be led to esteem and practise the obligations of piety, but our servants and dependants. We cannot indeed force them to it, and we need not. But we can give them opportunity, and advice and encouragement : we can remove the obstinately bad, to preserve the rest : we can put the instruction of good books in their way : we can call them to family devotions, from the lamentable omission of which duty, a very great part of our sins and follies proceeds ; and we can likewise bring some of them at one time, and send the rest at another, to the house of God. It is very true, praying and reading at home, and going to church, are neither the whole nor the main of their duty ; and they will be faithfully told so, when they come here. But these are parts of the first and great commandment, regard to him that made us ; and they are such parts, as, if they neglect, they will too easily think they may as well neglect the rest. Most of them would be glad of this kind attention to them ; all of them would respect us for it : and, were ever so many of them indifferent about it, or worse, ought it to be an affair indifferent to us ? when poor, ignorant, thoughtless creatures come to live under our roof ; is it Christian, is it human, to let them go on, just as they will, to their own destruction of body and soul ? they contribute a great deal to our happiness : why should not we contribute, since we so easily may, in this important point, to theirs ? But indeed is not our own, present as well as future, deeply concerned in it too ? Our ease, our characters, our fortunes, our lives, depend on the honesty, the veracity, the sobriety, the diligence, of those about us. And what can se-

cure these qualities in them so well, as their being persuaded, that God requires them at their hands ; and will treat them, as they treat us ? Were this motive weaker than it is, no real one ought to be despised. Loud complaints of the ill behaviour of the lower part of the world, are made continually ; but whom have the upper part to thank for it but themselves, if they take no care to prevent or mend it ? with the best care it will happen too frequently ; but, without it, what else can happen ?

Upon the whole, it is astonishing, that any, who pretend to be good, can fail to endeavour, that their children and servants may be religious ; when not a few, confessedly bad, take such precautions as they can to make them better than they are willing to be themselves. And undoubtedly this is very prudent, so far as it goes. But, as the prudence of such people is throughout essentially defective, so this instance of it, ordinarily speaking, can go but a very little way. For what likelihood is there, that a few right exhortations, or directions, from the head of a family, will make the members of it modest and sober, just and regular ; while his example authorizes them to be lewd and intemperate, unjust and disorderly ? or that sending them to church will teach them to reverence God ; whilst, perhaps, the table-talk that they hear daily, teaches them to despise him ? Our conduct therefore must be all of a piece ; else we shall neither succeed, nor will it avail us to our own eternal happiness, if we do. But let us first resolve to serve God ourselves ; and then we may insist, that they who belong to us shall, both with a good grace, and good hope of his blessing : to which we cannot acquire a stronger title, than by that method, which procured, as we read in Scripture, to the Father of the Faithful and his

descendants, a benediction so distinguished, both temporal and spiritual : *Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that, which he hath spoken of him.**

* Gen. xviii. 18, 19.

S E R M O N XV.

MATTH. xxii. 37, 38.

JESUS SAID UNTO HIM, THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIND. — THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT.

THESE words contain the former part of our blessed Lord's answer to the question, *Master, which is the great Commandment in the law?* It was put to him by one of the scribes or lawyers, the authorized instructors of the people, *tempting him*: that is, designing to make trial of his knowledge, and the soundness of his doctrine. For the man's intention plainly appears to have been no worse than this, from his immediate approbation of our Saviour's judgment; and the gracious assurance he received in return, that *he was not far from the kingdom of God*, as we read in the parallel place of St. Mark.*

Which of the Commandments is the greatest, may seem to us a question of more curiosity than importance: because undoubtedly the least, as well as the greatest, ought to be observed. Yet still it was a point of some consequence in itself: since two precepts might interfere: and men be obliged to omit one in order to obey the other: now in such cases it was material to know which they should prefer. But the notions entertained amongst the Jews increased the necessity of a right decision of this doubt.† They divided the injunctions of the law, as appears from

* Mark xii. 34. † Vid. Schoetgenii Hor. Heb. & Talm. in loc.

their books yet remaining, into weighty and light ones. The former, they held, a man must keep strictly, *if he would enter into life*† eternal : but the latter, some of them affirmed, had only a small recompense belonging to them, and that in this world ; so that a man might neglect them, one Rabbi saith *trample upon them*, without much danger. Nay, there were teachers of considerable reputation amongst them, who asserted, that God had given his people so great a number of precepts with this view, that, by observing any one, meaning probably any of the weighty ones, they might obtain salvation.* This was very bad : but their opinions, which were the weighty ones, made it worse yet. Some insisted that those alone were weighty, the transgressors of which, it was expressly threatened in the law, should be cut off ; and all the rest light. Some held the third Commandment, some the fifth, some the observation of the Sabbath, some that of circumcision, to be the weightiest. In our Saviour's time, it seems by the reply which the Scribe made him, that sacrificing was commonly thought the principal article of the law. And indeed many passages, not only in the Gospels, but in the Prophets, evidently shew, that the nation in general were fond of exalting the ceremonial precepts above the moral ones, because they found them less disagreeable. In themselves, it must be owned, the former were a heavy yoke, though in their circumstances it had long been a needful one. But to bad men nothing is so heavy, as reforming their hearts and lives. It is true, their sacrifices, and all their observances, rightly interpreted, required this, in order to their final acceptance with God. But the outward act being a

* Matth. xix. 17.

† Pocock on Hos. xiv. 2. cites this from Ikkarim, l. iii. c. 29.

matter of great form and punctuality, and sometimes expence too, they easily persuaded themselves of what they had a great mind to believe, that a scrupulous performance of such troublesome and shewish duties would certainly be sufficient, whatever their inward dispositions and common behaviour might be. Yet, at the same time, the *Essenes*, no inconsiderable sect amongst them, though affecting privacy, and probably therefore not appearing in the History of the Gospels, ran into the contrary extreme: and, professing great sanctity of manners, omitted the temple-sacrifices intirely.*

In such a state of things as this, it was natural to ask the sentiments of so remarkable a teacher as our blessed Lord: and very important, both for the instruction of the people and for his own character, that he should declare them. Undoubtedly he had now a fair opportunity of securing the applause of the multitude and their leaders, by an answer suitable to the notions in vogue; instead of gaining, as he did by contradicting them, only the single approbation of one good man. *But for this cause came he into the world, that he should bear witness unto the truth:†* which yet he did with such prudence, as never to prejudice the least part of it in his zeal for the greatest. When he blamed the Scribes and Pharisees for preferring the minutest of ritual observances to the *weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith*, he added immediately, *These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.‡* In the text he proceeds with the same caution: and well knowing how prone men are to draw false consequences from the truest doctrines, not content with

* Philo, Liber quisquis virtuti studet, vol. ii. p. 457. ed Mang. Joseph. Ant. l. xviii. c. 1,

† John xviii. 37.

‡ Matth. xxiii. 23.

deciding *which was the first and great Commandment*, he assures them, that the second, a very comprehensive one, was of the same nature and obligation with it: nay, for yet fuller security, subjoins a declaration, that though to these were subordinate, yet with these were connected, whatever things else the Scripture had required. *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great Commandment.* And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* Here then we see the whole system of our duty, standing on its proper foundation, and exhibited to our view in its natural order: beginning with the love of God, proceeding to the love of our fellow-creatures, and perfected in a careful attention to every regard of every kind owing to either; which we cannot pay, without a virtuous government of ourselves.

The love of God is the subject to be explained at present: which I shall do by shewing,

I. Its nature.

II. The importance of it in point of duty.

III. Its influence on our happiness.

IV. The methods which infinite wisdom hath employed, to cultivate it in our minds.

I. Its nature.

Various affections cannot fail to arise in our hearts from contemplating the attributes and actions of our Maker. His eternity and presence every where must needs raise in us wonder and astonishment. His unbounded power and knowledge, besides increasing this greatly, must also fill us with apprehensions, that our

* Aben Ezra saith, the love of God is, *שרש כל המצוות* the root of all the Commandments. Buxt. Floril. p. 278.

happiness or misery depends on his conduct towards us. But there is no determinate ground in all this for being either pleased or sorry. If then we consider next, that the same being is perfectly just and righteous, this immediately gives us absolute security, so far as we are innocent; and great comfort, that he, who can do all things, will do only what is equitable. It gives us fear indeed, with reason, in cases where we are conscious, as in multitudes we all are, of ill desert. But such dread, even in the guiltiest of men, must be accompanied with a real, though unwilling, approbation of the character: and the penitent concern of better minds will be attended with reverent esteem. Yet, were we to stop here, our veneration for God would be incomplete, because there still remains a more valuable and engaging quality than any that we have hitherto been ascribing to him. But let us advance one step further, and place before our eyes the universal bounty and mercy of our heavenly Father, proved by the plainest reason, experienced in the works of his creation and the course of his providence; but exercised most fully beyond comparison in the unspeakable blessing of our redemption, and revealed to us most plainly in the declarations of his holy word: then, if our souls have any feeling, there will spring up in them, lively sentiments of complacency, of gratitude, of love. And when once goodness hath made the impression, every other perfection of his nature will both strengthen it inexpressibly, by enabling him to do us continually all possible acts of kindness, and at the same time regulate it duly, by a proper temperature of that awful respect, with which our tenderest affections towards *the high and holy one, that inhabiteth eternity*,* ought ever to be intimately mixed.

* Isai. lvii. 15.

Such then is the love of God. And as our sense of the divine excellence cannot be too strong, but must indeed at the best fall infinitely short of what he deserves; we are commanded to love him *with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind*; that is, with the utmost exertion of our inward powers. Not that we are to confine our whole affection to him: for it follows, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. Whatever hath any thing amiable in any degree, we ought, as far as we can, to esteem in proportion: and consequently him beyond expression most, who hath in the highest degree possible every thing that can appear amiable to our rational faculties, duly exercised. All objects therefore are to be excluded, so far as attachments to them would be inconsistent with devotedness to our Maker. Now the worship of false deities is peculiarly inconsistent with it. And for that reason the love of God, when prescribed to the Jews in the Old Testament, is usually explained by adhering to him with conjugal fidelity, (for under that image it is often expressed) in opposition to his rivals, the idols of the nations; and not dividing themselves, as they were extremely apt to do, between Jehovah and them. But if, instead of these idols, we *set up* any others *in our hearts*;* make unlawful pleasure, power, profit, resentment, our deities; this also is an evident breach of the faith which we have vowed to our sovereign gracious Lord. Nay, if we value the most allowable objects of desire so highly, as to forget or think little of the supreme God, we still incur the same kind of guilt. For we ought to consider whatever we have cause to love best, as bestowed on us by his hand; and therefore as a motive to love him above all, *from whom every good and perfect gift cometh down*.† To say

* Ezek. xiv. 3.

† James i. 17.

indeed, that we ought to love it in this view only, as coming from him, would be going too far : because, had we been ignorant of God, most things, that deserve our liking now, would in their degree have deserved it then. But still, the more we attend to the goodness of God in every thing, without neglecting the inferior attentions to which he hath bound us, the nearer we approach towards being what we ought

And further, the more affectionate this regard to him on all occasions is, the better it will suit, not only the words of the Commandment, but the dictates of reason itself : which clearly teaches, that the warmest piety is due to the author of all our enjoyments. But then it must be observed, however, that love to a being intirely spiritual cannot, ordinarily speaking, raise in us those perceptions of animal fervour, which earthly passions can : nor ought we to esteem ourselves upon them, if we had them. For experience proves, that very bad men may feel at times high raptures of this kind ; and very good men may scarce ever feel any thing of them : so much do they depend on constitution. Far therefore from affecting such emotions, when we really have them not ; which is a sort of hypocrisy, whether shewn before men, or in the presence of God alone ; we ought not to be too earnest in our wishes for them. If he gives them, we are to be thankful : if he with-holds them, it is either for our needful correction, or, perhaps, our true inward improvement. And by labouring to work ourselves up to them, nay, by merely indulging them when our natural frame inclines us powerfully towards them, we may be quite bewildered and lost in unmeaning or injudicious transports, little or nothing akin to that sublime duty, of which they would put on the appearance. But still less ought it to be confounded, as it often hath

been, with a blind, or what is worse yet, a bitter vehemence of religious zeal. For the most ardent devotion, so far as it either produces injustice or indifference to our brethren, or proceeds from unworthy conceptions of God, is indeed by no means the love of him, but of a phantom of our own imagination, placed in his stead. And the real and only test of the genuineness and strength of this divine affection in our breasts, is the unvaried constancy of a sincere and reverent delight in the Father and Lord of all, as the perfectest and best, and most beneficent of beings ; expressed in humble and hearty praise and thanksgiving, in a studious imitation of him, and a chearful obedience to him.

The next thing to be laid before you is,

II. The importance of cherishing and acting from this principle, in point of duty.

Most people seem to think, that what they are pleased to call moral behaviour, though perhaps in some points grossly immoral, is their whole duty. Others, who have some notion of piety, carry it little further than attending public worship, more or less frequently, perhaps with very little thought of what they are about. Some, who make a conscience of private prayer also, it may be doubted, neither feel, nor endeavour to feel, much of the good things they say in it. Or, whatever sense a few may have of the fear of God, they have usually none almost of love to him. Any real experience of that affection, they have heard so often treated, even by professedly serious Christians, as mere enthusiasm, that they are apprehensive of danger from it. The Scripture doth indeed enjoin it : and so they will bear with the mention of it in discourses from the pulpit, provided it be passed over slightly, or interpreted away to just nothing : else they conceive it to be at best intirely supererogation ; and

leave it accordingly with all their hearts to such as chuse to have more religion than they need.

And, it must be confessed, this way of thinking hath received too much countenance from the indiscreet and extravagant manner in which the subject hath been sometimes handled. But surely, explained as you have heard it now, there can be nothing more reasonable, or of greater moment. If we have any principle of goodness in ourselves, that must lead us to esteem and love it in others. Now in God is perfect goodness : and therefore not to esteem and love Him, is to be void of right affection towards that Being who deserves it infinitely the most. Our duty consists in such behaviour as the relations of things require of us. To whom then are our first and most important relations ? Are they not evidently to our Maker, Preserver and gracious Benefactor, to our sovereign Lord, and final Judge ? Other claims, however like in their nature, must be unspeakably inferior in their degree to his. What sort of morality then is that, which dwells only on the transitory obligations of men one to another, and overlooks the eternal bonds which tie us, *so long as we have our being,** to Him, *of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all things ?†* The regards that we owe him, indeed, are numerous ; and vary in some measure as our spiritual state doth. But still, as goodness, though combined with other attributes, was in the beginning the active principle in the mind of God, and ever prevails through all his dispensations : so is love, though occasionally associated with other movements of soul, the original and universal affection, due to him from all his rational creatures : or, in our Saviour's words, *the first and great commandment.*

* Ps. civ. 33.

† Rom. xi. 36.

Suppose, in the mutual intercourses of this world, any one should value, as he ought, a person of but low desert; and yet be insensible to much higher merit, well known to him, in another; should be duly grateful to the former for favours, not worth naming in comparison with those which the latter had done him, and yet should leave him and all his kindness out of his thoughts: would not such a turn of mind be very wrong and criminal? Would not such an excellent and beneficent person be very unequally and unjustly treated? Yet this is exactly the common behaviour of mankind. Here we live amongst poor imperfect creatures, like ourselves. We receive a few small benefits from some of them, and see a little glimmering of goodness in others; and should be very blameable, if we did not feel and express a proper esteem for them, on account of both. Now there is at the same time, not only within our knowledge, but ever most intimately present with us, a Being of inconceivable perfection and loveliness; from whose bounty we and this whole universe have received our very existence, and every capacity of enjoyment that belongs to it: by whose continual support we are upheld in life; whose grace excites us to every thing good; whose forbearance passes over our daily transgressions; nay, *who hath commended his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ, his only Son, died for us, that being justified by his blood, we might be saved from wrath,* and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.†* What then have we cause to think of ourselves, if we love not him who himself is love;‡ if such acts of kindness make none or faint impressions on our hearts; if we reflect but seldom upon them, and are influenced but little by them? Is there, or

* Rom. v. 8, 9.

† Ver. 2.

‡ 1 John iv. 8.

can there be, an instance of ingratitude from man to man, that bears the least proportion to the unworthiness of such a temper? For that God hath no need of our acknowledgments, as our fellow-creatures often have, only proves his goodness to be the greater; and therefore ought not surely to make our sense of it the less. Now, if these things are thus evident to our view, in how much stronger a light must they appear to his all-seeing eye? And with what dislike and indignation must he look on so shocking a depravity, as that of refusing him the very affection which he purposely and principally formed us to exercise towards himself, its most deserving, its only adequate object? For, as all that in a moral sense is good in his whole creation, is but the shadow of divine perfection; so the esteem and love of what is good must ever be essentially defective, till it leads us to, and terminates in, the love of Him.

But let us now consider also the effects of this principle on other parts of our duty. We must set our hearts on something. Worldly things are all of them trifles. Many of them are not to be attained, but by unlawful means: however attained, fondness for them debases and corrupts us. We see and feel it every day: all the wickedness that prevails on earth springs from it. Therefore, to avoid this danger, men have been directed to fix their attention on the rightness, the amiableness of virtue: and right and amiable it is, no question. But, without having recourse to unhappy experience, the plainest reason shews, how weakly and how transiently the bare idea, the abstract notion of moral excellence must affect such creatures, surrounded with such temptations as we are, compared with an affectionate regard to Him, in whom the fulness of it dwells, and overflows on all the works of his hands.

Every sort, indeed, of regard to God, is a more powerful incitement to virtue, than any other motive: but love hath a peculiar force; often in beginning a change from evil to good, but always in carrying it on and completing it. While we obey only from fear of him, we are unwilling and backward, imagine difficulties, contrive excuses; and think it a point gained, if we can persuade ourselves, that this or that needs not be done. If hope be added to it, without any inducement more generous, we shall still be in danger of aiming to get our reward by doing as little for it as we can. But those, whom we love, we serve with alacrity and zeal; forget our own inclinations to adopt theirs, hate every thing that displeases them, despise every thing that doth not recommend us to them, look on their commands as favours and honours, rejoice to encounter difficulties for their sakes, and think we can never do enough to testify our attachment to them. What noble improvements then must love to God make in the performance of our duty; and how can it fail,

III. Of increasing our happiness, even in this world, as well as the next!

For want of cultivating this delightful affection, the thoughts of him are dreadful to the generality of men. Too many are tempted to wish in their hearts, if they durst, that he were not, or had no regard to human conduct; and if any of them can but persuade themselves for a while, on the strength of some poor cavil, to hope what they wish, they triumph in the imagined discovery, that sets them so much at ease. From the same default, humbler and righter minds consider him very often in no better light, than as a rigid law-giver, arbitrarily exacting a number of almost impracticable duties, and enforcing them with the dread of insupport-

able punishments: whence they are ready to sink under the terrors of religion, even while they are conscientiously fulfilling its precepts. Looking on God as the object of love would rectify these mistaken conceptions intirely. We should all see and feel, that a Being of infinite goodness, directed by infinite wisdom, is the highest blessing; and the want of such a one would be the greatest calamity, that is possible: we should be satisfied, that the strictest of his laws, and the severest of their sanctions, are means which he knows to be needful for our good; that his mercy will forgive on repentance our past transgressions of them, that his grace will strengthen us to keep them better, and that he will never reject a soul affectionately devoted to him. In proportion then as we are so, all terrifying apprehensions will vanish from us. *There is no fear in love, saith St. John; Fear hath torment; but perfect love casteth out fear.**

Another sort of men there is, who have not much uneasiness, but little or no pleasure in religion. What they call performing their devotions, is commonly nothing more than going heavily through a few customary shews of respect, and repeating by rote a certain number of good words, without any life, or almost any meaning. No wonder if the benefit of such worship seems to be so small, that more than a few, whose consciences would not suffer them to neglect it, cannot however help considering it as a burthensome task, enjoined them, they scarce know why. But were these forms and shadows turned into substance, by the real exercise of that devout affection which is professed in them, we should none of us any longer think hardly or meanly of the highest and happiest employment of the human soul. We should

* 1 John iv 18.

be filled with pleasing reverence in doing homage to the gracious Lord of all, celebrate his perfections as interested in every one of them, give ease to our hearts by a penitent confession of our offences, make our claim to his promised mercy with most joyful gratitude, vow to him chearfully a more vigilant obedience, feel a double satisfaction in every comfort from having received it as his gift, and disburthen ourselves of every anxiety, by committing to his providence all our wants, and all our cares.

Every other love may cause the acutest misery. The object of our tenderest earthly regards may be insensible or ungrateful ; may prove many ways inferior to our expectation ; may be wretched and make us so ; may be snatched away on a sudden for ever. But love to God is subject to no disappointment ; is indeed a cure for all that can possibly happen to us. While we *set our affections on things above,** the chief treasure of our soul must ever be safe : even *those things*, that seem to be the most *against us,†* we are expressly assured, are *working together* all the while *for our good :‡* and the more of our inferior enjoyments God requires us to sacrifice to him, the fuller opportunities he gives us of manifesting that supreme value for him, which he seldom fails to reward amply here, by infusing into us a sense of his favour, greatly superior to all worldly pleasure ; but at least *he hath prepared in Heaven for them that love him, things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.§*

Indeed, how large a part, that love itself, which we have preserved inviolate through the trials of life, will then make of our felicity ; when we shall be raised

* Col. iii. 2.

† Gen. xlii. 36.

‡ Rom. viii. 28.

§ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

above all our present low objects of desire, and have every faculty of our souls adapted to embrace the only worthy one; when we shall experience his immediate beatific presence, feel joys unutterable, flowing directly from him, and be completely assured, that *this God is our God for ever and ever* :* how transporting the movements of our affections towards him may then become, is not for us now to say or conceive. But so much apprehension of it we must surely have, as will shew that our most important interest lies in forming ourselves to that disposition of heart towards him in this life, which is necessary to our blessedness in the next. For the principal felicity of Heaven consists in God: and unless we love him, we cannot enjoy him, or be happy with him.

Let us therefore proceed to consider,

IV. The methods which infinite wisdom hath taken to cultivate so excellent a principle in our minds.

Love owes its being to goodness; and so may be produced, either by a general contemplation of its amiableness, or by favours personally received from it. That we are capable of the former and purer sort of love, delight in a benevolent character, though we have never been benefited by it, nor possibly can be, is a truth, of which every day gives proofs with respect to our fellow-creatures, whom we affectionately esteem, though inaccessiblely distant from us, though dead many ages before us. And therefore we are doubtless capable also of admiring and adoring the infinitely superior benevolence of our Creator, abstracted from the thought of our own sharing in it; as indeed we surely all of us love him for his bounty to the rest of the world, as well as to ourselves. But then this mere disinterested affection, though natural to our hearts, is very weak

* Ps. xlviii. 14.

and languid there, in the midst of so many other passions and appetites as our condition upon earth makes necessary for us, and the original depravity and super-added evil customs of mankind have so unhappily strengthened and perverted. Our hearts are pre-engaged and filled up, for the most part, with temporal, it is well if not with criminal, objects of desire, long before we come seriously to reflect on the spiritual and truly valuable one. Nor, when we do, can mere speculative meditation upon that be expected to prevail over the importunate calls which we have to other attentions: but experience of his bounty must be added, to invigorate esteem by gratitude. And plentifully it is added by our heavenly Father in his works of nature and of grace. *O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders which he doth for the children of men;** that *they would love him because he first loved us!†* But benefits received are soon forgotten: and whatever thankful warmth they may raise, while the relish of them is fresh and lively, cools and flattens; till, by long possession, we grow apt to think every thing that we enjoy our due; and feel nothing in relation to it but discontent, if any part is taken away or diminished. Knowing this, our indulgent Maker, that he may attract us more powerfully to himself, hath joined with the experience of present mercies, the hope of unspeakably greater to come: and *blessed is he whose hope is in the Lord his God.‡* For though it be a less noble, because more selfish, passion, yet, in the present case, it partakes considerably of something moral and religious. Any real desire of heavenly bliss must imply a degree of love, both to virtue and holiness, in which it will chiefly consist, and to

* Ps. cvii. 21.

† 1 John iv. 19.

‡ Ps. cxlvi. 4.

that holy Being who hath promised to bestow it. But alas ! worldly and sinful attachments debase mens natures, that they cannot aspire to, cannot earnestly wish for, any thing great and excellent. And therefore the wise Ruler of the world hath enforced his laws by the only remaining motive, fear : that they, whom nothing better will influence, may at least be influenced by considering the present sufferings and future misery, awaiting wickedness : a low and slavish inducement, it must be owned ; but however so far a good sign in him who acts upon it, as it shews him not to be inflexibly obstinate in what is evil. And, remote as it may seem from that generous flame which our Maker seeks to kindle in our breasts, yet the son of Sirach hath justly observed that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of his love.**

Fear, in the first place, can with peculiar efficacy restrain the outward actions of men, and keep them from adding strength to bad inclinations by indulgence. Fear, especially of punishment which they know they deserve, can make their vices become tasteless and unpleasant to them. And when once they are brought to avoid forbidden gratifications as hurtful, there is a fair prospect, that not only virtuous behaviour will recommend itself, as almost every thing doth, by custom, but that also its intrinsic fitness and beauty will come to be perceived, and awaken suitable affections. Or, if this be already the case, and yet vehement temptations hurry men on to sin ; (a very common and very pitiable condition) fear may be so impressed on the heart from above, as to overbalance

* Ecclus xxv. 12. See Philo de Abrahamo, p. 19. ed. Mangey : and a large Quotation from Maimonides, in Humphrey's Diss. on the Resurrection, prefixed to his Translation of Athenagoras. p. 52, &c.

these; free the rational principle from the oppression under which it labours, and enable it to resume its rightful dominion. Then the conduct will be reformed, the view of things gradually brighten, and the more ingenuous affections of hope and gratitude, and unmixed love, spring up and flourish; till at length our duty and our Maker, which at first we regarded unwillingly, on mere compulsion, will no longer have need of any other force than their own native attraction, to regulate every thought of our souls, and every action of our lives.

Thus then appears the wisdom and the goodness of those various methods which God hath taken to unite us finally to himself. He hath planted in our hearts that pure and disinterested esteem and love of moral perfection, which leads directly to the esteem and love of him above all; and without which we should not have been susceptible of genuine piety and virtue. But having placed us, with a nature prone to go wrong, in a world full of enticements, he hath not left us to the guidance of this one principle, which though the best in itself, would have proved insufficient for our direction; but hath kindly put us under the tutorage of subordinate affections, *to train us up in the way wherein we should go,** till we become enlightened enough *to approve the things that are excellent,†* and animated enough to pursue them for their own sakes. Let us therefore give up ourselves without scruple to the influence of every motive to our duty, which reason or Scripture sets before us, of pleasure or terror, of this world or the next,‡ and by reading, meditation and prayer, imprint them strongly

† לעולם יעסוק אדם בחזרה ובמצוות אפילו שלא לשמן שמחוק שלא לשמן
בא לשמן. Sota, fol. 22. col. 2. ap. Buxt. Floril. p. 156.

* Prov. xxii. 6.

† Phil. i. 10.

on our minds ; nor be at all dejected, though perhaps as yet the least worthy of them hath the largest share in our obedience ; as probably it hath for a time in that which most children pay to their earthly parents, for whose persons and precepts, notwithstanding, they acquire, by insensible steps, the most dutiful and tender esteem. But whoever would strengthen within himself this blessed disposition towards God, must frequently recollect and inculcate the conviction, that other incitements are but the means, and *love the end of the commandment* :* that we improve and grow inwardly better under the heavenly discipline, only in proportion as we advance in unfeigned affection, and are transformed by it into real likeness to the supreme good. Open your hearts therefore to feel his goodness towards yourselves, and imitate it towards your brethren. *For God is love : and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*†

* 1 Tim. i. 5.

† 1 John iv. 16.

S E R M O N XVI.

MATTH. xxii. 39.

AND THE SECOND IS LIKE UNTO IT, THOU SHALT LOVE
THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF.

THIS is the latter part of our Saviour's answer to the question, *Which is the great commandment in the law?* He had already answered sufficiently, by saying, it was the love of God. But most of the Jews before whom he spoke, thought the best proof of their fulfilling that duty was a scrupulous exactness in some, or all of the ceremonial precepts that God had enjoined them. And on the merit of this, they indulged themselves in great hardness of heart, even towards their brethren of the same religion; and in utter disregard, if not implacable hatred, of all who were of a different religion, perhaps of a different sect only. So that, if he had carried his reply no further, his hearers, *who had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge,** would in all probability have understood him according to their own preconceived notions, and never have suspected him of designing to condemn their superstition and uncharitableness. Therefore he immediately subjoins, from the express words of Moses,† another commandment, which, if they misinterpreted the first, might shew them their mistake; and if they did not, would plainly appear, to any considerate person, *like unto it* in its nature, and second in its dignity and use; *Thou shalt love thy*

* Rom. x. 2.

† Lev. xix. 18.

neighbour as thyself. But this also the Jews contrived to explain in a wrong manner, that they might gratify wrong inclinations. For which reason he took an opportunity to set them right. And besides the Jews, multitudes of others, both before and ever since, have done the same thing. Nay some, not content with perverting, and so disobeying, have directly found fault with it.

Yet whoever believes in a wise and good Ruler of the world, must believe it to be his will, that humanity should be practised amongst men: and whoever feels in himself kind affections, must think the exercise of them his duty. But then doubts are raised, who are intitled to our kindness, and in what degree: both which points therefore the precept, now before us, briefly determines. And I shall explain and vindicate its determinations, by shewing you the meaning, *first*, of the word *neighbour*; *secondly*, of the expression, *loving him as ourselves*: and proving in some measure all the way, but principally at the conclusion, the reasonableness and necessity of having so much regard for so many as the text requires.

I. Our *neighbour* then commonly signifies in Scripture, and not seldom in heathen writers, every person who is placed within our reach and influence. Accordingly, St. Paul, instead of saying, *he that loveth his neighbour*, saith, *he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law*.* We have usually the most frequent opportunities of doing good to those who live with us, or near us. But if any one, however distant from us, or unknown to us, particularly wants our help, he is, in effect, by that very thing, brought near us for the time, and put under our care. God's benevolence is absolutely universal: ours should be extended as far

* Rom. xiii. 8.

as it can : and the extent of mens power being extremely various and uncertain ; (for the meanest subject may sometimes, by one single discovery, do more general service to mankind, than the greatest monarch is capable of) the word *neighbour* hath this peculiar advantage, and therefore propriety, that it contracts or enlarges its signification, just as the case demands ; and either takes in the extremities of the globe, or confines itself to our own home.

Some have carried their public-spiritedness too far ; and piqued themselves on manifesting good-will to their fellow-creatures, by undertakings out of their province, and even beyond their abilities ; while their proper neighbours, those with whom they had close connexions, and their proper business, that which their circumstances bound them to mind, were disregarded : an injudicious conduct, when it proceeds from the best intentions ; but highly blameable, if vanity, or a meddling temper, be the source of it : on which head these persons would do well to examine themselves. But the far more ordinary fault is the opposite one : narrowing the bounds of our friendly dispositions ; and excluding those from the benefit of being our neighbours, who have a right to it.

The principal causes of this are three : hatred, pride and selfishness.

I. One chief ground of hatred long hath been, and is, diversity of faith or worship : of which case we have a most remarkable instance, Luke x. 25, &c There *a certain lawyer standing up, and tempting our Saviour with the question, What shall I do to inherit eternal life ; he draws from his own mouth the answer, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself : then tells him, Thou hast answered right : This do, and thou*

shalt live. But he, willing, as the Evangelist observes, to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? imagining, no doubt, as the sequel shewed, and as most of his countrymen thought at that time, and many ages after,* if they do not still, that none but the members of his own communion deserved the name; and that all others were to be deemed unrelated to him, and held in abhorrence. This abominable notion our blessed Lord might have confuted by numerous passages of the Old Testament:† but he thought it more useful to humble the vain man, by convicting him from the testimony of his conscience, and making him confess, without perceiving it, how unjust his interpretation was. For this end he tells him the moving story, that you all know, of the Jew and the Samaritan; of which two nations the former detested the latter beyond all others; and having easily brought him to declare, that the Samaritan had acted the neighbourly part, as he ought, to the Jew, it evidently followed that a Jew, upon occasion, should act the same part to a Samaritan. *Which thinkest thou was neighbour to him that fell amongst the thieves?* And he said, *he that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise.* O that all Christians of all denominations had learned, or would yet learn, from hence and from the whole tenour of the Gospel, what some of them in particular are lamentably ignorant of, or worse: that kindness and tenderness, and much more justice and equity, are due to those of every sect and party, from whom they differ the most widely: and due, as a condition of their *inheriting eternal life.*

Another thing, which often withholds our kind

* See Lightfoot's Harm. of New Test. and on this History.

† Exod. xxii. 21. xxiii. 9. Lev. xix, 33, 34. Deut. x. 19, &c.

regard from very fit objects of it, and excites hatred to them, is rivalry in profit, advancement, affection, reputation. And we may see in the world, perhaps feel in ourselves, if we examine, as we every one should, that competitions, not only about matters of some weight, but the merest trifles, can turn the best neighbours, the nearest relations, the dearest friends, into absolute strangers, if not bitter enemies. Nay the bare success of others, where we neither were nor could be their competitors, is enough sometimes to alienate our hearts from them to a strange degree. Yet surely we ought not to be hated by others, either for aiming at, or obtaining advantages, by any fair means ; nor consequently they by us. Nay, should they, in such a case, thwart an important interest of ours, to secure an inconsiderable one of their own : even this, though a sad defect of generosity, may in strictness of speech be no injustice.

But further, supposing a man hath directly done us a palpable injury, still he is our neighbour. Perhaps it was ignorantly, or inadvertently, or from such frailty, as we and all men are liable to : or it is but a slight or a single offence : or we had provoked him to it ; or received favours from him, that overbalance it, or he hath good qualities in other respects, that intitle him to our esteem. Or if he be, on the whole, wicked : yet possibly he is not incorrigible. While we are too much offended to bear with him, our heavenly Father, whom he hath much more offended, bears with him ; and is graciously trying all methods to reclaim him. You will say, “ God cannot be hurt by his wickedness.” Why, neither need you. By patience, you may always turn it to your spiritual improvement : by prudence, you may generally avoid any temporal harm from it. You may, if it be necessary, punish him for

it: yet consider him as one whom you could heartily wish to treat more gently.

2. The same bad effect, that resentment hath on some, pride alone hath on others: they cannot allow such low creatures, as the multitude are, to claim their notice, and even their love, by a presumptuous name, which implies a sort of equality with them. But indeed they are not only our neighbours, but our brethren: for God *hath made of one blood all that dwell on the face of the earth.** They have the same principles of human nature, the same rights of human society, the same protection of divine Providence here, the same covenant of eternal glory hereafter. And if we cannot, for the sake of these things, overlook the contemptibleness of their outward appearance, and treat them with compassion and beneficence, instead of scorn; we are much meaner wretches than great numbers of them.

3. A third inducement to deny others a claim to our neighbourly regard is selfishness: a worse turn of mind, on some accounts, than either of the former. A man's anger and pride can affect but part of his neighbours, usually a small one: to the rest he may still be friendly and beneficent. But the selfish man acknowledges no neighbour: is concerned solely for himself, and what he is pleased to reckon his own interest; which he places in wealth or rank, power or pleasure. And they who seek wealth only by excessive frugality, are generally disliked rather more than they deserve. But such as enrich or advance themselves by the wickedest rapaciousness and baseness, provided they live splendidly and expensively, are considered with an indulgence that hath extremely pernicious

* Acts xvii. 26.

cious fruits. And the most abandoned pursuers of immoral pleasure obtain, by their shewish gaiety, the character of the best natured people imaginable : though they often have originally, and seldom fail to acquire, the most absolute insensibility to public welfare, the ties of hospitality and friendship, the distresses of families, and even of the unhappy creatures who have believed their professions of the tenderest sentiments.

But next in guilt to such as mind none but themselves, is he, that fixes upon one, or some few, relations or favourites, for the objects of his whole affection : a fault the more dangerous, as possibly it may appear to him a virtue. He is doing his share of good : taking care of those, who naturally, or by a sort of adoption, belong to him. And doubtless we are peculiarly intrusted with such : but not authorized either to injure or neglect others for the sake of exalting these to a height that is needless, and perhaps hurtful even to themselves. Kindness of heart was planted in men, not to divide the world into little parties, each of which should keep separate from and be zealous against the rest ; but to unite all, as much as could be, into one neighbourhood, indeed one body, animated with one soul. It is not for our family, or our friends alone, that God is concerned, or would have us concerned : but universal good is his end, and universal good-will is the great instrument which he hath given us to promote it. Therefore we must always bear in mind the common relation of man to man : and, whenever it is doubtful whether that, or the particular ties of blood or intimacy require the preference, far from following the strongest propensity blindfold, we should labour to preserve the sincerest impartiality in forming

our judgment: for that and that only will effectually plead our excuse, if we err, as without question we often do.

Having now seen the scriptural and rational extent of the phrase, *Thy neighbour*, let us consider

II. What, and how necessary, that love is, which the Commandment in the text enjoins us to bear him. This, I hope, hath appeared already in some measure: but must be shewn more distinctly, because too many object, that they cannot help hating some persons, and see no cause to love many others.

Now, it should be considered, we have two sorts of love: one of esteem, founded on the opinion that men are deserving; the other, of mere benevolence, founded on the knowledge that they are capable of pleasure and pain. The former we may justly be expected to have for all we can: the latter, for all absolutely. There are people in the world, for whom we cannot well have much esteem. Yet every one hath some valuable qualities. Those whom we dislike, it is great odds, have more than we allow them: possibly, were it not for our passions and prejudices, we should find several of them to be highly worthy and amiable. And, though we are not always obliged to be acquainted with their merit, we are obliged not to detract from it. But, whatever ground we may have to think ill of them. Nothing hinders us from wishing well to them. If they are bad, is there not great need of wishing they were better? Continuing such as they are, is it not reasonable to wish them every enjoyment, that will do no harm to them or others? Do they not often in this world, and will they not certainly in the next, pay dearly enough for their wickedness? And is it not the part of humanity then to exercise pity towards them; and leave vengeance to Him whose it is?

“ But they are our enemies: is that a title to our
“ love ?” No, certainly. You are not commanded to
love them because they are your enemies, or the more
for being so: but only, in a due measure, notwith-
standing they are your enemies. Perhaps indeed they
are not so: at least, to near the degree that you ima-
gine. But if they were: hath not God loved us, and
sent his son to die for us, *when we were enemies* ?*
Hath he not abundant right to expect this return from
us? Doth he not expressly tell us, he expects it? Hath
he not planted a natural principle of relenting and for-
giveness in us? And is he not ready to assist us con-
tinually, by his grace, in the revival and cultivation
of it?

But you will say, “ Even to our enemies we will
“ do no wrong: should a proper occasion offer, we
“ will do them service: and then, how can it signify
“ any thing, what our affections to them are?” Why,
you may profess to behave thus, without loving them
at all: and you may possibly design it: but you will
not keep up to it. Such as your affections are, such
will your actions be: and endeavouring to restrain the
latter, without amending the former, you will find, is
continual uneasiness, and much labour, to little pur-
pose. Rectifying your inward disposition is going to
the root of the matter. To think of your neighbour
with mildness and candour, and therefore behave to him
with equity and kindness, is a plain way. But when
you pretend never to do him harm, though you always
wish it him; and to be ready to promote his happiness,
while you desire his misery: either you are not in ear-
nest, or you do not know yourself; it is too hard for
human strength. So that in this, indeed, in every in-
stance, where Christianity may seem to have made

* Rom. v. 10.

our duty more difficult, by enjoining the reformation of our hearts as well as our lives, it hath on the contrary made it practicable and easy, by putting us in the only true method. Besides, regulating the one, without the other, if we could do it, would be utterly insufficient to answer our Maker's great end, the purifying of our natures, and exalting us to a capacity of heavenly bliss. The affections, in the moral sense, are the man. And if you give up to God your outward actions only, your sacrifice is defective and unacceptable. You will plead it may be, that to him you give up your whole soul: for you love God intirely, though you hate bad men. But loving them, is one main proof which he requires of your loving him. If you loved, you would obey, you would imitate him. And therefore St. John declares, *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.**

Observe also, that as your love to your brethren must be inward and sincere, so it must have in view, not merely their present gratification, but their lasting benefit, even in opposition to that; and not merely their welfare in this world, but in the next too. For never was there surely a more dreadful abuse of words, than to call that good-nature, which complacently allows acquaintance, dependants, friends, relations ever so near, to go on unmolested to ruin, here and hereafter: nay, too often, directly invites and leads them to it. The Scripture, in prohibiting this behaviour, gives it the opposite name, and very justly. *Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.†* Whence, take notice again, that mere desire of good to another, when more is in our power, will by no means be sufficient. Love is an active principle: and

* 1 John iv. 20.

† Lev. xix. 17.

if we stop short, be it through penuriousness, or be it through indolence, contented with only wishing well to those, whom with moderate pains and expence we might actually serve ; it is leaving that affection to spend itself in doing nothing, unless it be cheating us with an imagination of our being better than we are, which God hath commanded us to cherish and exert for the noblest purposes.

But admitting, that we are to *love our neighbour* in this manner, still doth not the command of loving him *as ourselves*, extend to something impossible ? Certainly not. For we meet with several instances of persons being said to love others *as their own souls*, or themselves, both in the sacred* and profane writers :† and we are to understand the phrase agreeably to their meaning ; not to stretch it farther than they can mean. In Scripture, at least, it doth not denote the very highest affection that we are capable of. For the duty of loving God is plainly designed to be expressed in stronger terms, than that of loving our neighbour. Yet the latter must imply, not only good will as real as we bear to ourselves ; for, if it be inconsiderable, it will be ineffectual : but also a large degree of good-will ; for that also we bear to ourselves.

* Deut. xiii. 6. 1 Sam. xviii. 3. xx. 17.

† In quibus enim eadem studia sunt, eademque voluntates, in his fit, ut æque quisque altero delectetur, ac se ipso : efficiturque id, quod Pythagoras ultimum in amicitia putavit, ut unus fiat ex pluribus. Cic. Off. i. 17. Ex quo perspicitur, cum hanc benevolentiam late longeque diffusam vir sapiens in aliquem pari virtute præditum contulerit, tum illud effici quod quibusdam incredibile videatur, sit autem necessarium, ut nihil sese plus quam alterum diligat. Quid enim est quod differat, cum sint cuncta paria ? Cic. de Legg. i. 12. where see more. But he requires this degree of love not to every man, but between perfectly wise and good men. The doctrine of the Epicureans was, Nullo modo possumus amicitiam tueri, nisi æque amicos & nos ipsos diligamus Cic. de Fin. i. 20. where see more.

And farther, we are to love him in proportion as we love ourselves: to pay a more attentive regard to his interests, the more powerfully we are addicted by nature or custom to regard our own; and so preserve the balance of our affections in due poise. This, however, we shall do much better, if we also take the expression, as we justly may, to comprehend an injunction, that we love and consider our neighbour just as much as we should love and consider ourselves, were we in his case. For, though we be equally affected by his circumstances and our own, so far as we can know and feel both, this will carry us no unfit lengths in his favour: because we cannot know and feel both in the same degree: and, though we could, no harm would follow. Indeed we are sometimes bound, in the practical sense, to love our neighbour more than ourselves: to shew a greater concern for his good, not only than we do shew for our own; for which, God knows, in the principal points, we often shew none at all; but than we ought to shew for our own: because a very important advantage of his may be in question; and a small one, in comparison, of ours; which it would be meanness not to slight: or the advantage of many may be in one scale, and our own singly in the other. Now, when that happens, we may be obliged to go so far as to *lay down our lives for our brethren*;* not only for their eternal, but temporal welfare. Still, unquestionably, in all cases that but approach towards an equality, we act allowably in preferring ourselves, where no obligation of justice or truth exacts the contrary. And, in the endless variety of circumstances that occur in human life, all that could be done by precept, at least by any one short precept, and such mankind must have, was to

* John iii. 16.

give as awakening a caution as possible against the greatest danger, and as clear a direction as possible how to avoid it ; which, I hope, you are sensible, the precept before us hath done ; and then to leave both right and wrong minds to shew what they are : the one, by cheerfully taking, and diligently seeking, if there be need, fit opportunities of doing acts of humanity ; the other by raising scruples, inventing evasions, and neglecting the plainest calls, because some are doubtful.

Men may indeed be too prone to follow every good-natured impulse. And the few who have cause to suspect they are, should consider what they owe to themselves, and to other demands upon them, present, or probably future, as well as to the object which now strikes them : they should ask the judgment of pious and prudent friends : they should have some regard to the judgment even of the less good part of the world ; else they may possibly discredit the duty which they would wish to recommend. But giving ourselves up to be influenced solely or chiefly by common opinion and practice, is the way to extinguish every thing that is right in us. To a proper degree therefore the son of Sirach's advice is necessary to be observed : *In every good work trust thy own soul, for this is the keeping of the commandment.** Upright meaning, with a moderate share of discretion, will be a safe guide through whatever perplexities may at any time arise in relation to this precept.

Still you will say perhaps, that, explain and limit it as we will, it is very hard after all, that in order to obey God, and demonstrate our love to him, we must disobey the dictates of the strongest and usefulest principle he hath planted in our nature, the love of ourselves, and adopt others, often of very undeserving

* Ecclus. xxxii. 23.

characters, in our own room. But consider : self-love is not happiness ; it is not always the instrument of procuring happiness ; but makes us uneasy and wretched. It can procure happiness no otherwise than by exciting us to gratify our natural inclinations, when that will do us good ; and restraining us from gratifying them, when it would do us harm. Now love to our fellow-creatures is one of our natural inclinations. We all feel and shew it to be so, in some instances, more or less. And why is not the indulgence of it, within the bounds now prescribed, as likely to do us much good and little harm, as that of any other ? It is a pleasing movement of mind in itself. Reflection upon it affords a second pleasure. We approve and esteem ourselves for having it, and for attempting what it prompts us to. If we succeed, we have exquisite joy : if we fail, it is no inconsiderable comfort, that we meant well. And ordinarily speaking, all around us commend and applaud us for it. By these means our goodness often brings us great worldly advantages : and very often is attended with no worldly disadvantage. For there are many and daily ways of exercising it without expence or trouble. And if the rest do cost us something, perhaps we can well bear it, and not be at all the worse. But, were it more, do our indulgences of other inclinations cost us nothing ? Do not the debaucheries, the resentments, the amusements, the vanities, the caprices of men, interfere much more frequently and irreconcilably with the truest and nearest even of their temporal interests, than the love of their neighbour doth ? “ But these things, you “ will say, give much higher delight.” Perhaps not. For multitudes pursue with strange eagerness what yields them very little satisfaction. At best, it is a very unwise delight. And possibly you are pleased with

your present objects of desire, only because you have set yourselves to be pleased with them. Set yourselves therefore to be pleased with promoting the welfare of others : and you will find your account in it, beyond any thing in this world.

Indeed almost all the misery of this world proceeds from the want of it. The unavoidable evils of life are nothing to those which we bring upon one another voluntarily, by ill-nature, insensibility and heedless disregard. These are the heavy sufferings, that every one complains of and groans under, and always must, if every one will be guilty of such behaviour : and nothing can put an end to it, but social love. Instead therefore of being against the interest of any man, it is most essentially for the interest of all men : and were it to prevail universally upon earth, no injury would be attempted, no act of kindness neglected. For, as St. Paul argues : *This, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet ; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour ;* allows no commission, no omission, that may be hurtful to him : *therefore love is the fulfilling of the law :** all the obligations of human society are summed up in it. With perfect justice then doth our blessed Lord declare, that *on these two commandments, right affection to God and to man, both which imply it towards ourselves, hang all the law and the prophets.†*

But still, it may be, you will plead, “ how happy
“ soever the world would become, were all men in-
“ fluenced by these principles ; yet, since they are not,
“ why must we ?” Because the whole can be amend-

* Rom. xiii. 9, 10.

† Matth. xxii. 40.

ed only by the separate amendment of each part. “ But, you will say, unless the rest will amend, of which, to speak moderately, there is no likelihood in our time, the wickedness and misery of mankind must, if we are to love them so well, and seek their good so earnestly, occasion us much fruitless pain, innumerable disappointments and melancholy reflections.” Why, so it will, if we engage in too great, or too difficult, or too many undertakings ; if we raise our expectations too high ; or suffer opposition, either to kindle us into vehemence, or plunge us into despair. But we may go on very comfortably, if we preserve the true temper : exerting a calm settled benevolence on all fit occasions, because we ought ; without hoping to succeed very often, or to produce on the whole any remarkable change for the better : but labouring the more constantly for this very reason, that not a little of what we do will, to all appearance, with respect to others, be labour lost. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand : for thou knowest not, whether shall prosper, this, or that ; or whether they both shall be alike good.** But thus much we know however, that the seemingly most unprofitable exercises of kindness will not only be of unspeakable benefit to ourselves in the upshot, which might surely suffice us, but will prove some means in the hands of divine wisdom for bringing forth at length general good out of all evil. Being therefore thus *labourers together with God,†* why should we not be happy in our proportion ; as he is perfectly, notwithstanding the failure of his gracious purposes towards a world, which he loves infinitely better, than the best of us can ?

But you will argue further yet : “ Whatever peace

* Eccl. xi. 6.

† 1 Cor. iii. 9.

“ we may have within, we shall have none without,
 “ but be laughed at for poor tame wretches, and
 “ trampled on securely.” No such thing. Though
 few may imitate you, very few will in earnest despise
 you, and fewer still attack you in any material point.
 Love to all men cannot often provoke any man. And
 in case of assault, you are not forbidden the just
 methods of self-preservation ; you are commanded to
 be prudent as well as *harmless* :* you have the laws to
 protect you : all the good to support you, from inclina-
 tion ; and most of the bad, if for no better a reason,
 yet lest they should suffer next. You will scruple, I
 own, taking some advantages, by which they often
 succeed : but you will also avoid some disadvantages,
 by which they are often ruined. And, besides human
 helps, you will have the providence of God on your
 side, both to defend you and perhaps to reward you
 openly even here. Or, should he see it best for you
 to go without temporal recompenses, nay to suffer
 temporal inconveniences ever so grievous : bear but
 all patiently from a sense of duty to Him, and you will
 be filled with consolation in this world, and assured of
 glory in that which is to come.

Trust him therefore boldly with the absolute direc-
 tion of your hearts and lives. Let those, who resolve
 to be too cunning for their Maker, suppress and ex-
 tinguish every friendly sentiment in their breasts, be
 blind and deaf to the distresses of all around them,
 pursue with unrelenting fervour their own interests,
 their own pleasures, their own schemes of malevolence,
hateful and hating one another.† But let us *be*
simple concerning evil, and wise only unto that which
is good :‡ *shew mercy with cheerfulness, love with-*
out dissimulation, be kindly affectioned, in honour

* Matth. x. 16

+ Tit. iii. 3.

† Rom. xvi. 19.

*preferring one another, distributing to the necessities of the saints : rejoice with them that rejoice, weep with them that weep ; be not high-minded, but condescend to men of low estate :** look with pleasure on the virtues, the accomplishments, the success of others ; be slow to believe their faults, think of them with concern, and treat them with mildness : *love even our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us. For so shall we be the children of our Father, which is in Heaven ; who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.†*

• Rom. xii. 8—16.

† Matth. v. 44, 45.

S E R M O N XVII.

MATTH. iv. 1.

THEN WAS JESUS LED UP OF THE SPIRIT INTO THE WILDERNESS, TO BE TEMPTED OF THE DEVIL.

AS the word of God acquaints us with many things of great importance, concerning our present and future condition, which we could not else have known : so it opens to us particularly, a very interesting scene, in the discoveries which it makes of our connexions with the inhabitants of the invisible world, both good and bad. Indeed, that various orders of rational beings besides man, and superior to him, exist in this universe, is of itself extremely probable. That some, even of the highest of them, should become wicked, is only a wonder of the same kind, as that too many of the best abilities amongst men should make the worst use of them. That for their wickedness they should be *cast down** from *their first estate*,† and confined to a very different one, is a natural consequence of the divine justice and rectitude. That, though sufferers already for their crimes, they should yet be *reserved unto the severer judgment of the great day*, is but just the very thing that reason teaches concerning the sinners of the human race also. That they should be desirous in the mean time of seducing us into transgression, is very natural : for we see the profligate amongst ourselves desirous every day of

* 2 Pet. ii. 4.

† Jude 6.

doing the like. That this should be possible for them, is by no means inconceivable: for, since the material frame of our earth is confessedly liable to powerful influences from other parts of the creation, why may not the intelligent natures in it be so too? That evil spirits should be permitted to assault us in a degree consistent with our freedom of will, is evidently as reconcileable both to the holiness and goodness of God, as that we are suffered to tempt one another, often perhaps full as dangerously. That they should be capable of conveying their suggestions to us, and we not know their manner of doing it, can hardly be called strange: for we scarce know the manner how any one thing in the world is done, if we examine it to the bottom; not even how we convey our own thoughts to those with whom we converse. And that we should be exposed to these temptations, without perceiving them to proceed from any such cause, is far from incredible: for we are frequently influenced, and strongly too, by persons of no higher powers and abilities than ourselves, without perceiving that they influence us at all.

But, though every one of these things is rationally supposeable, yet Scripture only can satisfy us, that they are true in fact: and so accordingly it fully doth. For though it tells us, that bad angels are held *in everlasting chains under darkness*,* it tells us likewise, that *our adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about*, meaning, doubtless, within the extent of his chain, *seeking whom he may devour*.† And yet, even after the testimony of Scripture given to these doctrines; as they relate to matters which lie out of sight, and therefore affect the mind but faintly, unless the truth and importance of them be carefully

* Jude 6.

† 1 Pet. v. 8.

impressed upon it, we receive them too commonly with only a wavering kind of half belief, which produces no manner of serious thought about them. And so by degrees we first overlook, and then doubt, and then reject, one part after another of what is revealed concerning the hidden regions of the creation ; (as, indeed, if once we begin, where shall we stop ?) till, at length, instead of *walking*, as Christians ought, *by that faith,** which is *the evidence of things not seen,†* we come to consider earthly objects as the only realities, and heaven and hell, and the inhabitants of each, as nothing at all.

Some, it must be owned, far from disbelieving what they understand their Bible to teach on these subjects, make it almost a point of religion to believe a great deal more ; whereas the plain and safe rule certainly is, to go as far as Scripture goes, but also to stop where Scripture stops. For whatever notions are credulously entertained, beyond its warrant, will always, in the event, weaken, instead of confirming, the persuasion of its genuine articles. But, undeniably, the prevailing extreme at present is, that of questioning, or slighting, though we do not question, whatever is placed a little without the reach of our own faculties, be it ever so clearly asserted by our Maker himself. This turn of mind is highly undutiful ; and tends to mislead us, in the whole of religion first, and then of common life. The remedies for it are, to think of ourselves with humility, and read and consider the doctrines of God's word with reverent attention. That of our being tempted by invisible powers needs not have any wrong effects upon us, and may have very right ones. For, as these temptations are not distinguishable by us from those which arise of

* 2 Cor. v. 7.

† Heb. xi. 1.

themselves in our own breasts, and may be resisted effectually by the same methods, the belief of them can by no just consequence drive us either into superstition or despondency. But the consideration of having such an additional adversary, besides the world and the flesh, must naturally increase our watchfulness, and thankful dependence on the help of divine grace: and the reflection that, in committing sin, we are complying with the suggestions, and gratifying the malice, of the enemies of God, of our own souls, and of the whole creation, cannot but incline us to a strong abhorrence even of such transgressions, as we might else have been disposed to view in a pleasing light.

Now, of all the passages of Scripture which relate to this point of doctrine, there are none more instructive, than those of the Evangelists, in which we find our blessed Lord himself assaulted by the tempter: whose victory, for that reason, the wisdom of the Church hath taken care to set before our eyes in the Gospel for this day, as the properest admonition to us in the beginning of the present season: the business of which, if we purpose to be at all the better for it, is arming ourselves against those temptations with which we may meet hereafter, as well as humbling ourselves for having yielded to so many already. And therefore I shall now endeavour,

I. To explain this part of our Saviour's history.

II. To point out, in a few words, the practical uses that flow from it.

I. To explain this part of his history.

The number of wicked spirits is represented in Scripture as very large. And yet one only, denoted by the name of Satan, or the Devil, is generally mentioned as inticing men to sin. The reason of this, in other places of Holy Writ, may be, that as they are all

united under one head, and engaged in one design, they are to be regarded by us as one adversary: for, in the common language of war, we speak of the enemy in the singular number, when yet we mean a multitude. But there is more especial ground for it, in the text, as unquestionably *the prince of the demons** himself would personally engage in so arduous a combat, as that with Jesus must appear likely to prove. That he, who bears ill-will to all men, should earnestly wish to mislead and pervert one, whom he could not but see to be a very extraordinary man, and sent on some errand of singular benefit to the human race, was to be expected. And that he should hope to do it, may be accounted for, partly from hence: that as wicked men, though of eminent abilities, are perpetually attempting very absurd things, so may wicked spirits too: as indeed all wickedness implies, in its very nature, the absurdest hope and attempt in the world; that of being gainers by disobeying a wise and just Ruler, of infinite power. Besides the devil had fallen himself, even without a tempter: he had succeeded by the means of temptation against the first man, and more or less against all men since; and probably he knew not distinctly what manner of person this was whom he assaulted. For, though he might know him to have been declared the Son of God, still that name is capable of various meanings. Or, if he knew him to be the promised Messiah, yet he might imagine that this promise as well as others was a conditional one, though no condition was expressed; and therefore liable to be defeated. Or, at least, rage might urge him to molest though he despaired to overcome.

* Matth. ix. 34. The word here is not *Διαβολος*, nor is that ever used of wicked spirits in the plural number: and therefore it is properer to say demons, than devils.

But then, why *the Lord of all*,* who quickly afterwards cast out demons with a word, submitted previously to such repeated indignities, as these trials made of him by the power of darkness, perhaps we cannot fully say. But this at least may be said very safely, that, for any thing we know, it might *behave him*, not only in general, *to be made in all things like unto his brethren*, that so he might resist the devil on our behalf perfectly, whom we resist very imperfectly ; but, in particular, to give the enemy all advantages and opportunities, in order to make his defeat more conspicuous : besides that we may gather, as I shall shew you in the conclusion, much instruction and much comfort from the benefit of his example, and from the condescending assurance, which *his having suffered himself, being tempted*, affords, that he will *succour us* when we *are tempted* also.† The wicked one made this attack upon him at the beginning of his public appearance, because undoubtedly he thought no time was to be lost for preventing the good intended by it. And *Jesus was led up of the Spirit* purposely to meet him, because the divine omniscience foresaw the event. As for the choice of the wilderness, for the scene of action ; we find, that he often retired into places of solitude for meditation and prayer : and no wonder if he did it now, before he undertook the inexpressibly weighty office, for which a voice from Heaven had just marked him out. The addition of fasting to his devotions was another instance (his baptism had already been one) of *fulfilling all righteousness*,‡ by doing in obedience to God's general appointment, what, if he did not want, good men in all ages have experienced, when used on fit occasions, and to a proper degree, very needful and beneficial. His fasting the

* Acts. x. 36.

† Heb. ii. 17, 18.

‡ Matth. iii 15.

determinate number of forty days, leads us immediately to recollect, that Moses the giver of the law, and Elias the chief of the prophets did the very same thing in their times, which he, who *came to fulfill the law and the prophets*,* did now. Nor are there wanting remarkable coincidences of the number of forty on other occasions. What secret of Providence may lie concealed under them, appears not yet : future occurrences, perhaps, will shew it. But, in the meanwhile we may venture to say this : that as our Saviour used so long and total an abstinence but once, and we are incapable of using it so much as once ; repeating a faint shadow of it every year cannot be our duty merely from his example : and that, neither himself nor his apostles having laid any such command upon Christians, the fast of Lent stands only on the footing of human, though ancient, injunction, and private prudence.

During these forty days, it is observed by St. Mark, our blessed Redeemer *was with the wild beasts* : which words must imply, else they are of no significance, that the fiercest animals were awed by his presence, and so far laid aside their savage nature for the time : thus verifying literally what Eliphaz in Job saith figuratively concerning a good man. *At destruction and famine shalt thou laugh, neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth : for they shall be at peace with thee.*† Nor doth St. Mark only, but St. Luke also acquaint us, that throughout these whole *forty days he was tempted of Satan* ;‡ though in what particular manner, they have not said ; nor perhaps did he inform his very Apostles : there being many things in his life, that were mysterious even to them : and no marvel then, if they are so to us.

* Matth. v. 17. † Job. v. 22, 23. ‡ Mark. i. 13. Luke. iv. 2.

When the days of his miraculous fasting were completed, the tempter came to him in a visible form : a thing, which we have neither any reason from hence to fear will ever be our own case, or to believe is ever the case of other common men ; nor yet to doubt of its having been his, from its never being ours or theirs. For the whole life of Christ was so full of wonders, that the history of his temptation is perfectly agreeable to the rest : and we must either question all, or no part. In what likeness the devil appeared, we are not told : probably resembling one of the good Angels, who seem by St. Mark to have attended our Saviour, and *ministered unto him*,† in the course of this wonderful dispensation, before his combat, as well as after his conquest. We learn from St. Paul, that Satan hath been sometimes *transformed into an Angel of light*.† And such a transformation, on the occasion before us, not only suits best with his two last temptations, but was certainly the likeliest to procure him success in any of them. At least he certainly did not appear what he was : for that would intirely have frustrated his intent. And accordingly we find, that as soon as he knew himself to be discovered, he despaired and fled.

The first attack which the tempter made, was grounded on the bodily necessities of our blessed Lord ; now again permitted to feel the appetite of hunger ; and destitute, where he was, of all means to satisfy it. On this foundation the devil raised a proposal of refined artifice : that he should instantly make an experiment, and give a proof, of the truth and extent of the late declaration from Heaven in his favour, *This is my beloved Son*,‡ by ordering a supernatural supply for the want which pressed him.

* Mark. i. 13.

† 2 Cor. xi. 14.

‡ Matth. iii. 14.

*If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.** Every one, perhaps, may not immediately see where the fault of this would have been ; which is the very circumstance that made it a fit temptation. Satan had no prospect of being able to lead him at one step into a gross transgression : and any real deviation, however small, from either piety or virtue, would have answered his end. Now, compliance with this counsel would have been a deviation. The voice from heaven alone carried evidence enough along with it of God's especial regard to him : and desiring a yet fuller demonstration of it would certainly have argued a blame-worthy diffidence. He had been supported by the sole word and will of his heavenly Father for forty days : why must he now, without any sufficient notice of the change of that will, attempt a new miracle for providing himself bread to live on ; as if the old one, which enabled him to live without it, had lost its force ? When God designed him to return to the ordinary way of life he would furnish him with every thing requisite for it : but in the interval, it had been as absurd for him to think of producing bread for himself in the wilderness, as for Moses to have thought of producing it for the Israelites there, instead of the manna, rained down from Heaven for their sustenance. And therefore he answered, with the utmost propriety, in his own case, exactly what Moses had observed to them upon theirs, *that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.†*

The wily Serpent, appearing in all likelihood perfectly satisfied with this answer, and convinced that acting otherwise than our Saviour did, would really have been distrusting God, proposes next, (and

* Matth. iv. 3.

† Deut. viii. 3. Matth. iv. 4.

possibly under colour of making amends) to give him the most illustrious opportunity of shewing the highest confidence in God that could be. And, the meek Jesus patiently yielding to what he clearly discerned the intention of, the tempter conveys him through the air, (no wonder that he suffered it, for he suffered wicked men to take much greater liberties with him afterwards) and places him on one of the battlements of the temple of Jerusalem: exhorting him to cast himself down in the sight of all the worshippers there assembled, and procure that glory to the Deity, and that honour to himself, which must be the consequence of their seeing publicly and literally fulfilled in him that prediction of the Psalmist concerning a pious man, which so eminently pious a one as he had certainly both reason and faith enough to depend on: *He shall give his Angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone:** possibly insinuating farther, by the use of these words, his own ambition of being employed as the instrument of so noble a miracle, for which he had just before shewn himself qualified, and the tutelary spirit of so excellent a person. But the Redeemer of mankind, far from being disconcerted by the sudden change of the argument, or dazzled by so specious a plea, calmly answers by another text of Scripture, explaining and limiting that, which the seducer had quoted imperfectly, and applied wrong: *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*† As we ought not from diffidence to ask new proofs of his power, where we have had sufficient ones already, so neither must we from presumption urge him to do for us what we have no need of, and what therefore he hath given us no right to expect.

* Ps. xci. 11, 12. Matth. iv. 6. † Deut. vi. 16. Matth. iv. 7.

For they, who throw away the natural means, which he hath bestowed on them for preserving themselves, forfeit all title to a supernatural protection.

Though unsuccessful in both these assaults, the tempter notwithstanding, begins another without delay, probably built on the defeats which he had undergone. He places our blessed Lord, still giving way to his vain efforts, on a commanding eminence; represents to him from thence, in extended view, or mimic imagery, or pompous description,* whatever was great and splendid in the kingdoms of the earth; alledges, that to himself, as the vicegerent of the Almighty, the dominion of this sublunary world was granted; over which he was willing to place, on the reasonable terms of homage done to him for it, one, of whose superior understanding and rightness of mind he had now made so thorough a trial. *All this power will I give thee: for it is delivered unto me. If therefore thou wilt worship me, all shall be thine.*† To each of the former suggestions the holy Jesus had replied without emotion: but now, when the majesty of his heavenly Father was injured, and the faith of his own allegiance to him assailed, by so vile a falshood, he bears no longer; tells the hypocrite, he knew him well for the adversary of God, who had granted to no created being, much less to him, the honours, or the authority, which he claimed;

* Heuman, Diss. Sylloge, tom. i. p. i. Diss. 7. thinks he only pointed towards each kingdom, and shews that *δεικνυω* and *ostendo* signify this. Bibl. Germ. 1748. Jan. p. 108. Spartian, in the Life of Severus, saith, that from the top of a high mountain he saw Rome, & *orbem terrarum*. Cyprian, ad Donatum de Gratia Dei, p. 4. Ed. Fell, exhorts him: *Paulisper te crede subduci in montis ardui verticem celsiorem, speculari inde rerum infra te jacentium facies; & oculis in diversa porrectis, ipse a terrenis contactibus liber, fluctuantis mundi turbines intueri.* And hence he supposes him to see the whole of it.

† Luke iv. 6, 7.

and commands him that moment to quit his presence. *Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* Then the devil leaveth him, and angels came and ministered unto him,* doubtless whatever his condition required.

All hopes of seducing him were now at an end. What remained was only to oppose and persecute him. And, as this method was taken very soon after the former failed, St. Luke observes, that *the devil departed from him but for a season.*† Accordingly Christ himself expresses the whole of his public life on earth by the phrase of *his temptations.*‡ But as every contrivance of *the ruler of darkness* § against him proved ineffectual; so that, which he laboured most, and at length accomplished, the taking away of his life, instead of preventing the erection of our Saviour's rightful kingdom, gave the mortal blow to his own usurped tyranny. For *through death* the Son of Man destroyed him who had the power of death, that is the devil: || and having spoiled principalities and powers, triumphed over them on his cross. ¶

II. I come now to speak briefly of the practical uses that flow from this part of our Saviour's history. And the following are not inconsiderable: that the best of men are no more exempt from temptations than others; but may possibly be tried with a larger share of them, and such as are harder to be withstood; that every one therefore ought, in every part of life, to prepare for them; and no one, merely on account of his suffering ever so many, to doubt of the favour and love of God: that allurements to evil may perhaps beset us with peculiar importunity in the entrance upon

* Matth. iv. 10, 11.

† Luke iv. 13.

‡ Luke xxii. 28.

§ Eph. vi. 12.

|| Heb. ii. 14.

¶ Col. ii. 14, 15.

our Christian course ; but, if we resist them faithfully then, may cease in a great measure afterwards ; and God's grace enable us to go safely and honourably through the severest conflicts of any other kind : that retirement and meditation, fasting and prayer, are the right preparatives against all solicitations to sin ; which yet may come upon us in the very midst of our religious duties, and strictest observances ; nay, Satan may seek advantage from them to mislead us : that if, even at such times we are not secure, much less are we so in the midst of the cares and pursuits, but especially the pleasures of life ; by thoughtless indulgence of which, we invite and aid the tempter, whom we ought to shun and oppose : that we should never venture out of the plain road of duty, to supply the most urgent necessities ; never run into needless danger, in hope of extraordinary deliverance ; never accept the greatest advantages, when offered as the price of our innocence : that riches, and honours, and power are the most dangerous of trials, being reserved for the last in the case of our blessed Lord : and whoever can reject them instantly with indignation, when offered on sinful conditions, as he did, is far advanced in the road to perfection : that laying up the doctrines and precepts of Scripture in our hearts, ready for use, is providing the best defence against our spiritual enemies ; yet that Scripture itself may be easily perverted to misguide us, unless we carefully interpret one part of it by another, and every one by the design of the whole : that the effectual way of dealing with all evil suggestions, is to repel them with an immediate, and short, and determinate answer, founded on God's word ; and that permitting them to reply to us, and plead with us, is only giving them a handle to deceive and destroy us : that they, who are led by the provi-

dence of God to meet difficulties, will, if they ask it, be filled with the Spirit of God to go through them ; and so *with the temptation he will also make a way to escape* :* or, to speak in St. James's words, *that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us ; and if we draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to us.*† That since we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one, who was in all points tempted like as we are, we may come boldly through him to the throne of grace, and find help in time of need. But then, as he was tempted without sin,‡ we must imitate, though we cannot equal, him ; and really, though not perfectly in this life, conquer sin also : for only to him that overcometh will he grant to sit with him in his throne.§ Yet, as the tempter departed from our Lord himself only for a season, we are not to imagine, that he will ever depart wholly from us : but may still comfort ourselves, that if we put on the whole armour of God, and wrestle against him as we ought, we shall be able to stand against all his wiles :|| nay, every attempt to weaken our virtues, shall only prove a wholesome exercise to strengthen and improve them ; till at length, having fought the good fight of faith, we shall lay hold on eternal life ;¶ and not only the angels, who minister to us now assistance in our conflict, shall join with our fellow saints in applauding our victory, but the captain of our salvation** himself acknowledge us openly for his good and faithful soldiers and servants.†† Blessed is the man that endureth temptation : for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them who love him.‡‡

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

† James iv. 7, 8.

‡ Heb. iv. 15, 16.

§ Rev. iii. 21.

|| Eph. vi. 11, 12.

¶ 1 Tim. vi. 12.

** Heb. ii. 10.

†† Matth. xxv. 21.

2 Tim. ii. 3.

‡‡ James i. 12.

S E R M O N XVIII.

PHIL. ii. 21.

FOR ALL SEEK THEIR OWN, NOT THE THINGS WHICH ARE
JESUS CHRIST'S.

THESE words contain both an account what the practice of mankind is, and also an intimation what it should be. And therefore, in discoursing upon them, it will be proper,

I. To consider what is meant by *seeking our own things*.

II. What by *seeking the things of Jesus Christ*.

III. To explain and prove the assertion, that *all seek* the former, *not* the latter.

IV. To shew what we are to learn from it.

I. *Seeking our own things*, is pursuing our own inclinations and fancies, or imagined worldly interests. And many strange fancies people of all ranks indulge. Some never ask themselves, whether the course which they are taking is likely to be for their good : others never slacken it, though from time to time they strongly suspect it is not. Often they adopt, without examination, the opinions of those about them, whom yet they are far from esteeming ; and either will not see, that better judges think differently ; or do see it, and will not regard it, but follow custom blindfold, even against their own liking. Or it may be, they think a little, but think short ; neither to the end, nor to any considerable part, even of the present life : imagine what

pleases now, must always please ; and what brings no inconvenience yet, will never bring any. Indeed, usually, it is their principal point, to acquire the things which others wish for, though visibly of no real use ; and they are vehement for whatever will make them envied as happy persons, though it produce little else than vexation and guilt. Some will not trust even their own experience against their prepossessions : but force themselves to believe, that the lives which they lead must needs be delightful, though they feel the contrary. Many lose the opportunities, and even the relish, of moderate and rational pleasures, by a wild pursuit of visionary and extravagant ones. Nay, there are some who not only follow wrong ways, but, as the text hath it, *seek* them : go purposely out of the plain road, as it were, in search of misery. It were much to be wished, that all these were more studious of their interest, even their temporal interest, than they are : it might be one step towards becoming what they ought. But still the most faithful and assiduous worshippers of the world's great idols, applause, advancement, profit, power, entirely mistake, if they hope that any of these things will either secure them lasting enjoyment, or preserve them from acute misery. A little reflection discovers, that happiness consists in somewhat stable and inward : whence the more thoughtful have learned to seek it in themselves. But, alas ! when we inspect ourselves, what a mixture do we find, of ignorance which we cannot enlighten, of weakness which we cannot strengthen, of wrongness which we cannot set right ? Besides that all creatures, as such, are essentially insufficient for their own happiness ; there is by nature a void within us, which must be filled from above, or we must remain for ever craving

and unsatisfied. Let us therefore look upwards, and consider,

II. *The things which are Jesus Christ's*: the benefits that he hath procured for us, with the knowledge of them that he hath communicated to us. And indeed what have we of value, that is not his? Some have pretended they could investigate all the doctrines, the duties, the rewards of religion completely by their own reason, and form themselves to a suitable disposition by their own strength. But the history of heathenism clearly shews, that no one ever did this; nor probably therefore ever would. The one true God was scarce known. False deities of the worst characters were adored, instead of him, with rites that seldom, if ever, mended their votaries, often corrupted them. The common rules of social life were by no means thoroughly understood; as the shocking custom of exposing children to perish, the barbarous combats of gladiators, the promiscuous and unnatural practices of lewdness, publicly allowed, give dreadful proofs. But the internal virtues of the heart were still less regarded; and they who seemed possessed of them, ascribed the merit wholly to themselves: very few said so much as the Pharisee, *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are*: scarce any with the Publican *God be merciful to me a sinner*.* Yet how continually are the best of men guilty of faults! But they had hardly any notion of the universal need of repentance, or any name for humility of soul. Forgiveness of injuries was very unsteadily taught: benevolence to enemies lay yet further out of sight. Courage injuriously exercised, patriotism shewn by invading the rights of their neighbours, and numbers

* Luke xviii. 11. 13.

of other splendid sins, passed for heroic excellencies. There was very little hope of future bliss to give men spirit in doing what was right, and less fear of future judgment to deter them from what was wrong. Such were the best instructed nations: and such, or worse, had we been probably now, but for the compassion of Jesus Christ. Indeed without him we should never have known, till too late, how bad our condition was. The real state of mankind, with respect to God, was, in a great measure unknown to them, till he underwent what he did, at once to lay open to us our danger, and to free us from it on most equitable terms. Even the mysterious parts of what he taught for this purpose lead us to reverence the divine wisdom, and think modestly of our own; while the more distinctly intelligible direct us to every thing that is right and fit.

The Gospel hath laid the foundation of our duty in that pleasing and thankful veneration of God, which his creating bounty, his providential care, his redeeming mercy, excite: and which tends to inspire us, with a deep concern for whatever we have done offensive to him, an earnest desire of obeying his commands, an humble sense that we need his assistance, a firm persuasion that he will grant it to us, a cheerful reliance on him for every thing that we want, in regard to this world or the next. This excellent frame of mind must powerfully suppress irregular appetites of sense, immoderate desires of wealth, vain fondness for pomp and pre-eminence, anxious cares about worldly events. And on such love of God Christianity builds its second great commandment, love of our neighbour: a duty, enjoined in a higher degree, and carried to a greater extent though still a reasonable one, in Scripture, than in any other institution of religion. It prescribes the most accurate and tender attention to the

obligations which result from the nearer connections in life, the most industrious endeavours to be useful in whatever station we fill, the most affectionate faithfulness to the community of which we are members, tempered with universal good-will to the rest of mankind: benevolent respect towards those who excel us; readiness to pardon, as far as can be safe, all who have wronged us; esteem of whatever in any person deserves it; sincerely kind wishes to those whom we esteem the least; compassion for the wretched, and relief to our utmost ability, though we straiten ourselves. Nor doth our blessed Redeemer expect us only to pity, as he did, the temporal wants of men; but, as he did also, their spiritual ones unspeakably more; a precept peculiar to the Gospel, and comprehending a great variety of important particulars: provision for instructing the young and ignorant; and combining afterwards pious advice with outward relief to the sick and needy; seasonable warnings, and mild reproof, when there is hope of their being regarded; constant circumspection to set a prudent, as well as innocent example; that we lead not others into danger, by what, perhaps, we can do ourselves with safety; but submit to considerable restraints, rather than let *our liberty*, as the Apostle expresses it, *become a stumbling block to them that are weak*.^{*} Studying to observe these rules, for they require and merit study, is *seeking the things that are Jesus Christ's*. And they are opposed to our own, not as being really contrary even to our present interest: very far from it. Only through the inbred disorder of our hearts, and the general prevalence of evil habits, we are apt to delight in very opposite dispositions: and hence a good life comes to be a self-denying one,

^{*} 1 Cor. viii. 9.

which else would be the constant practice of self-love. The ambitious would seek *the true honour that cometh from God* ;* the selfish would have respect to the heavenly recompence of reward ;† the lovers of pleasure would secure *the fulness of joy* which is *for evermore* :‡ and the means of being happy here and hereafter would evidently appear to be the same. But now the difficulties of performing our duty are so great, and our failures in it so many, that, amongst *the things that are Jesus Christ's*, we must seek with peculiar earnestness his grace to strengthen us, and an interest in his merits to procure us acceptance, which thus the weakest and worst of us all may be sure of obtaining.

Yet, great as these blessings are, the Apostle hath said, that *all men seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ*. Let us therefore

III. Examine into the meaning and the truth of this melancholy assertion.

It is plainly not to be taken in the utmost extent. For he had given the contrary character of Timothy just before, as he hath of others elsewhere. But he may well be understood to say, that all absolutely have some share of blame in this respect: and the generality, which in common speech the word *all* frequently signifies, are highly and dangerously blameable. For who can deny this to be fact? Many are vicious in every way that inclination prompts them to. Many, who regard some parts of virtue, disregard others, perhaps avowedly. The more uniformly regular would do well to ask themselves, Whether it is from a real inward sense of duty, or for the sake of reputation or convenience? They who make a conscience of behaving right in common life, do they make any of paying due honour

* John v. 44.

† Heb. xi. 26.

‡ Psal. xv. 12.

to God? Our strongest obligations of every kind are to him: yet numbers think highly of their own merit, while they neglect him: and, it may be, pique themselves on neglecting him. If we profess ourselves believers in him, do we statedly and fervently pray to him, and give him thanks for his daily blessings? Do we live in his fear and love, and the hope of his future mercy? Supposing we sincerely embrace natural religion; have we carefully inquired into the truth of Christianity; unprejudiced by attachment to forbidden pleasures, by the vain fancy, that nothing can be true which we comprehend not fully, by ludicrous or sophistical misrepresentations? And, to guard us against these, have we consulted proper books and persons? If we call ourselves Christians, do we observe conscientiously all the institutions of Christianity; or slight them when any trifle intervenes: and do we observe them otherwise than as mere forms? Do we use them to impress on our souls the importance of the doctrines, the pardon, the grace, the rewards of the Gospel? And do we employ our faith of all these things to improve us in every part of a Christian temper? This temper, and our inclinations, too often interfere. Which do we prefer? And where do we lay the foundation of our conduct? We ought not to lay it in attention to our own interests or amusements, joining now and then with them a little appearance, or perhaps a little reality, of religion, provided we can make it agree with them. But the rule is, *seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**. The ground-work of every thing good, is a devout resolution to do our whole duty. Each is to do it suitably to his own station: but all, in whatever station, high or low, are to make it their inviolable con-

* Matth. vi. 33.

cern: for God *hath given no man licence to sin.**

Whoever doth not feel this truth, as the most important one that belongs to his existence; and govern his conduct by it, in trying as well as ordinary cases, hath not *sought the things of Jesus Christ* in a due manner. And think then, I entreat you, how few have. A sad reflection! but we must remind our hearers to make it. Else how much pleasanter would it be to congratulate the good on their happy state, than to terrify the wicked; to encourage the modest and timorous, than to confute the presumptuous, and alarm the thoughtless!

But, such being the condition of the world, let us now consider,

IV. What we are to learn from it.

And certainly we ought to learn great mildness towards others, who are faulty: since, more or less, all are so. Even the first Christians, even the first of the Christian clergy, for of these, it must be owned, the Apostle peculiarly speaks in the text, fell very short of perfection. And ever since the best have had their defects, and the worst their good qualities. Let us therefore think and hope, as well as with any reason we can, of all. Yet still, they who abandon themselves to wickedness, and especially they who labour to pervert others, either in principles or practice, and to make a bad world worse, be they ever so agreeable, be they ever so useful to us, are to be avoided, and checked with more care, the more danger there is of their doing harm. That we are unable from various circumstances, to exert this right spirit, may sometimes, perhaps often, be a just plea: but ought never to be made a false pretence. The firm purpose of doing it should always be kept in mind, and executed

* Eccclus. xv. 20.

as soon as possible, with amends for the delay. At the same time, in proportion as the bad give real marks of reformation, they should be diligently encouraged, yet with prudent, and cautious, and gradual kindness. But above all, the honest, the virtuous, the conscientious, the pious, ought to be countenanced, brought forward and cherished, as *the salt and the light of the earth*,* who preserve society from corruption and dissolution, who shew men the way to present and future happiness. Nor should they be rejected or despised, though sometimes inferior in qualifications of less moment, nay, though in some respects, hurting, through mistake, their own good cause: of which however, it is very unjust, though very usual to condemn or suspect them, without or beyond reason.

But the principal point is, what we are to learn in regard more immediately to ourselves. If the world be so bad, there is great need to ask our hearts, what are we who make a part of it? Conforming to it implicitly is by no means the rule either of Scripture or of reason: yet is it not too much our practice? A little honest home inquiry would soon furnish the true answer. But we turn our eyes from what we have no mind to discern, and try to deceive not only others, but ourselves. Yet to what end? God knows the truth. Men will know it, if they do not; and angels too. We ourselves know it in part all the while; and shall know and lament it to eternity, if we refuse to take the proper notice of it in time.

Examine therefore what the tenour of your conduct is. If it be dissolute or intemperate, the necessity of amending it is glaringly visible. If, though otherwise innocent, you consume your days chiefly in trifles; such waste

* Matth. v. 13, 14.

of precious time, given for other ends, is highly criminal. Besides that, both the supinely indolent, and the busier votaries of idle amusements, expose themselves to various temptations, and set a dangerous example to those around them: the tendency of which, as it spreads, must be, to make persons of all ranks, even the most important, and, by consequence, the community composed of them, insignificant, contemptible, and vicious. Further still: though your disposition be to things of more use, and so far commendable, yet if on any occasion you indulge either resentment or malevolence, however calm, towards any of your fellow-creatures; if you are injurious or hard-hearted, from selfishness; or but thoughtlessly inattentive to the rights the interests, the wants, the feelings, of those whom you ought to regard, you may thus have contracted, in many ways, most heinous degrees of guilt. Nay, supposing you have been, and are, beneficent as well as harmless, but less so than you might; even this defect is a failure of duty. Not that you are to give way to scruples; there is no end of them: but, to consider maturely, and consult worthy friends; what you can add to the good which you do already. Possibly it may be more than you imagine. Be it ever so little, do it but according to the best of your judgment, and God will accept it. But at the same time, be sure to remember, that the rightest demeanor in worldly matters will not suffice; but our chief regard must be to him who made us, and whose therefore we are. From his goodness all that we enjoy proceeds; from his authority over us all our duties flow: and those which are owing immediately to himself, surely require our principal care. But such duties as natural reason teaches, are far from being the only concern of those to whom he hath prescribed additional ones,

founded on the important alterations which our primitive state, as we learn from Scripture, hath undergone. Man is a fallen creature: *We are dead*, as the Apostle strongly expresses it, *and our life is hid with Christ in God.** Our hope of future happiness lies not in ourselves, but is reposed in the hands of the blessed Jesus, who purchased it with his blood: *and where our treasure is, there must our hearts be also.†* Without affectionate and habitual movements of the soul towards the Father of mercy, the Author of salvation, the Inspirer of holiness; without a deep sense of past guilt and present imperfection, an humble faith in the merits of our glorified Redeemer, and a firm reliance on the grace of the Divine Comforter, all our virtue, all our piety, will avail us nothing. For, when we have done our best, *we are but unprofitable servants.‡*

You will object, perhaps, that indulging contemplations of this nature would engross our whole thoughts and time: the affairs of common life must be utterly neglected for them. But are you indeed at all near the borders of that danger? Or do not such objectors take thorough care to keep far enough out of the reach of it? You are by no means called only to acts of devotion, or only to the more sublime of moral duties. Prudent and moderate concern for our worldly interest is a duty. Every propriety and decency of life is a duty. Even ornamental accomplishments have their value. But from these concessions men conclude, that they may safely pay their main attention to what deserves but the smallest part; and imagine they are abundantly good Christians, almost without any one peculiarly Christian action or sentiment. At best, a few pious formalities practised

* Col. iii. 3. † Matth. vi. 21. Luke xii. 34. ‡ Luke xvii. 10.

now and then, constitute their whole religion: and the rest of their life, and all their heart, is given up to what hath no tincture of religion in it: whereas inward reverence of God, as he is manifested to us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, ought to be our ruling principle; and extend its influence throughout each article of our business, our conversation, our private thoughts.

Perhaps you will object again, that so very serious a turn of mind as this, will cast a gloom over every thing: and one must have some pleasure surely. But learn to be pleased with what you ought: and you will have inexpressibly more pleasure than you possibly can else. In other things you take pains, no small pains, to acquire a taste; often, for what is of no value; sometimes, for what is bad: and perhaps, after all, can succeed no further than to put on the affectation of liking what you really do not, or get by habit a wretched craving for gratifications, which you cannot but despise and condemn. Employ yourselves better. Esteem what is estimable, and it will exalt instead of debasing you: love what is amiable, and it will reward your affection. *Love him* above all, who hath *first loved you*:* and his service will be delightful: become such as he requires, and you will find satisfaction in every thing. It is a strange mistake, to imagine the burthens of religion insupportable; while we take much heavier upon ourselves from fancy and fashion. Were the Gospel to enjoin the fatigues, the expences, the dangers, which on reflection we shall perceive caprice and custom do, that one argument against it would be accounted decisive.

The most serious person in the world may justly

* 1 John iv. 19.

be also the cheerfullest. Even penitents, in the midst of their sorrow, at the very beginning of their amendment, enjoy a blessed hope of forgiveness and acceptance, infinitely preferable to the highest pleasures of sin. But persons of confirmed goodness have a *peace* within their breasts, *which passeth all understanding** of those who have not experienced it, and all description of those who have. They feel no tormenting remorse, no disquieting dread of God or man. They are never agitated by malice or envy: seldom, and but gently, moved by anger. Pity indeed they often experience; but gratifying it comforts both others and themselves. Their behaviour is friendly, and therefore agreeable: their discourse lively, if nature hath qualified them for it; but at least inoffensive and conciliating. Their hearts are open, in a proper degree, to all the innocent amusements of life, and they long for none of the prohibited ones. Virtuous discretion preserves their health and spirits as much as worldly uncertainties permit, makes their circumstances easy, their families and dependants orderly and happy. Their judicious beneficence is very useful, their blameless example yet more. Thus they become blessings within the compass of their sphere: and surely reap no little joy from the esteem of others, but unspeakably more from the testimony of their own consciences. The best of them indeed are sensible of many failings: but all consistent with that sincerity, which God, they know, will recompence. They see through the whole course of life, that they are in the only right way; and whatever may happen to them, all will end well. Disappointments, unkindness, ingratitude, losses of friends or of fortune, necessity, pain, sickness, and death,

* Phil. iv. 7.

*work together for their good,** and unite to form an infallible plan for increasing their final felicity. Never will society grow gloomy, but inexpressibly the cheerfuller, for being composed of such persons as these: and such ought the religious naturally to be.

Therefore you, who are truly religious, appear in character, and do credit to your cause. Despise with good-humour and pity the impotent ridicule of the inconsiderate: let the world see that you are happy, and that your belief in God is the ground of it. Wear no dejected looks, put on no forbidding appearances; be affable, be courteous, be joyful. Avoid improper amusements; guard against fondness for those in which occasionally you may do well to join: but express a decent and modest, a mild and compassionate, not an angry or censorious, disapprobation of the common excesses in them; shew that you can relish life perfectly well without them, by engaging with alacrity in the proper business of your station, improving yourselves, and doing good to others. Never unseasonably magnify in talk, but assiduously demonstrate in fact, the comfort you have in observing the precepts and expecting the rewards of the Gospel. Manifest, whenever opportunities present themselves, yet without any ostentation, the benevolent serenity which Christian faith inspires, your enjoyment both of conversation and solitude in their seasons, your composure under doubts and uncertainties, your fortitude under crosses and afflictions, and your settled persuasion, that you shall ever be enabled to *possess your soul in gladness of heart,†* and *rejoice in the Lord alway.‡*

Such behaviour will surely convince even the vicious and the prejudiced, if they have any reflection, that to

* Rom. viii. 28. † Luke xxi. 19. Acts ii. 46. ‡ Phil. iv. 4.

seek their own advantage with success, they must *seek the things which are Jesus Christ's*. And if they ever intend it, the present time is always the best: but this present time is peculiarly so. Decency prohibits now the usual diversions: apply your vacant hours to a better purpose. The offices of the week throughout express in the most affecting manner, what your gracious Redeemer hath done and suffered for you: think deliberately in it, what you ought to do for him, indeed for yourselves. Think what you have been, and are, and what the faith you profess requires you to be: consider what fatal consequences will follow, perhaps very soon, if you neglect to amend, and how you shall accomplish this necessary work. Read with reverence the rules and declarations of God's Word; read with attention other awakening yet prudent books, reflecting as you go along; and engage some pious, but judicious friend to excite, support, direct, and if there be occasion, restrain you. Form discreetly by their helps needful resolutions; and beg earnestly of God strength to fulfil them: else they will all prove ineffectual. But remember, that the piety of the week, however strict, is not to end with it; and cannot be really Christian, if it doth. You are called to recollection now, that you may practise vigilance all the rest of your days. Temporary, periodical goodness, that is *like the morning cloud, and as the early dew goeth away*,* will be of no avail to any one; but they, *who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality*, are secure of obtaining *eternal life*.†

* Hos. iv. 4.

† Rom. ii. 7.

S E R M O N XIX.

GAL. vi. 14.

BUT GOD FORBID THAT I SHOULD GLORY, SAVE IN THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST: BY WHOM THE WORLD IS CRUCIFIED UNTO ME, AND I UNTO THE WORLD.

WE must have some foundation, real or imagined, for thinking well of ourselves and our condition; or we must be wretched. And innumerable are the methods which men take to procure the esteem of their own minds. Too many *glory in their shame* :* are proud of notions and discourses, which misrepresent sacred truths, degrade human nature, and tend to dissolve human society; of gratifying their passions, their appetites, their fancies, whatever mischiefs it produces; of doing what visibly hurts, and must finally ruin, their characters, their fortunes, their healths, their souls. Others value themselves on more plausible, yet insufficient, pretensions: on the lustre of an ancient family, which perhaps they disgrace; on the inheritance or acquisition of wealth, which they employ to little or no good purpose; on agreeableness of person, which makes them vain and imprudent the short time it continues, and miserable when it decays; on liveliness of wit, which either provokes enemies, or invites dangerous friends; on depth of knowledge, often

* Phil. iii. 19.

falsely so called and pernicious, often wholly foreign to their true business ; on elegance of taste in smaller matters, while they are contemptibly injudicious in the greatest ; on pomp and shew, which give a pleasure as fleeting as it is childish ; on making a figure in the idle hurry of amusements, which encroaches on every valuable purpose of life, and wears out the spirits under pretence of raising them ; on the favour of the great, by whatever arts attained, and however precarious ; or on the seemingly more solid possession of power, which it is hard to abstain from using ill, and extremely hard to use in a due measure well ; which disoblige by the exercise of it many more than it can possibly oblige ; is accompanied with perpetual fatigue and uneasiness, yet with perpetual envy ; causes innumerable vexations while it lasts ; and yet commonly grievous regret when it is gone.

If all these be wrong grounds of self-complacency, how few of us have right ones ! There are those, however, who profess to build it on something more substantial, on virtue. But, alas ! the virtue of great numbers consists almost wholly in specious words, honour, benevolence, good-nature, which are either a mere ornament of their talk, or influence their behaviour only on some occasions, or to some persons. And the more uniformly well inclined towards others are often strangely addicted to blamable indulgence of themselves : or, however inoffensive otherwise, are lamentably defective in the discipline of the heart, particularly in forming it to that deep humility, which becomes dust and ashes. If we think too highly of ourselves, we shall be fatally misled : and, if we think reasonably, we shall experience the daily mortification of being faulty, more or less, even in those things for which we are applauded. Besides, our virtue itself

will frequently oblige us to do what others will dislike, oppose, revenge. Or, though we escape such evils, yet the unavoidable ones of fear, sorrow, languor, pain, sickness, death, are usually more than enough to make our present state a pitiable, rather than a glorious one, if the consciousness of our own rectitude be our whole support under them.

Wiser men, therefore, in their search of comfort, look beyond themselves to God. And indeed, faith in him, provided it represents him as a righteous governor, observing, distinguishing, and recompensing, unspeakably dignifies our condition, and adds importance to our prospects. But still, our best obedience being only his due, and paid only out of what we have received from him, we could neither boast nor merit, though it were perfect: and what his free goodness would bestow on us even then, beyond security from being sufferers on the whole, reason could never ascertain.

Or, were the innocent assured by it of ever so great rewards; are we innocent? Thoughtless presumption may answer hastily in the affirmative: but what doth the deliberate voice of conscience say, after a faithful scrutiny of our past actions, words and thoughts, as in the divine presence? Such and so many as our duties are, of love, reverence, and resignation to our Maker, of justice, equity, goodness, in the numerous relations of life, virtuous command of our various inclinations, careful use and upright government of our understandings; have we been always as blameless in each of them, as infinite purity can demand of us, though we see that no one round us hath? If not, let us remember it, we are sinners, and sin deserves punishment. *God forbid then that we should glory in*

our moral or religious characters: God grant we may find mercy for our failures in them.

But how can reason assure us that we shall? Doth it know, what the holiness of his nature, the honour of his government, the admonition of other parts of his creation, may render needful? Sorrow for what is past cannot annihilate it: and living well for the time to come, though it were not mixed, as what we call so is with perpetual faults, no more makes amends for past transgressions, than avoiding to incur new debts pays off the old. Still our hearts dictate hope. But hope, far from being certainty, is not so much as persuasion. And though pardon were unquestionable, future happiness, much less eternal, would not. The possibilities therefore, the probabilities of these things, which nature can suggest, how reviving soever, compared with absolute despondency, *have* to Christians, as the Apostle speaks in a similar case, *no glory by the reason of the glory that excelleth*:* they fade away and vanish before his *precious promises*,† who *was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification*.‡

Here then we have sure ground for glorying: not in ourselves indeed; for we have contributed nothing to this merciful dispensation, besides falling into the extremest need of it by our offences: but *Christ Jesus is made unto us of God, wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, that, as it is written, He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord*.§ We have only to embrace, with acknowledged unworthiness, the gracious offer of our heavenly Father, on the equitable conditions annexed to it.

* 2 Cor. iii. 10.

† 2 Pet. i. 4.

‡ Rom. iv. 25.

§ 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

But we must embrace the whole, not part only. Multitudes profess to respect the Gospel very highly, for its many rational doctrines, its holy and mild precepts, its interesting sanctions, its provision for instructing mankind, the good example of its Publisher, its declarations of forgiveness, nay perhaps also for its assurances of inward assistance. But of the efficacy of what our Redeemer underwent to procure these benefits, they entertain the lowest conceptions: raise difficulties on every article of *the great mystery of godliness*,* and explain away the Scripture doctrine of it into nothing: strive to form a Christianity as much as possible without Christ, and be saved, if not by their own merits, however not by his. Therefore the Apostle in the text lays the stress where it really lies: *God forbid, that I should glory in any thing, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ: in his submission to die upon it, not merely as a confirmation of his sincerity, which puts his and his Apostles martyrdoms almost on a level, but a propitiatory offering, by which, to speak the language of the holy Writ, he hath reconciled us to God, making peace by the blood of his Cross, in the body of his flesh through death.*† That he appeared on earth to establish true religion there, bore the inconveniences of this mortal state, *endured the contradiction of sinners*,‡ and yielded up his life to their malice, is the universal belief of all Christians; and why might not God, foreseeing these things from eternity, graciously accept his condescending to them for our sakes, though otherwise wholly foreign to a nature united to the divine, as a sacrifice offered on our behalf to infinite justice: bestowing on the priest and victim the most acceptable retribution that he could possibly receive, the right

* 1 Tim. iii. 16.

† Col. i. 20, 21, 22.

‡ Heb. xii. 23.

of pardoning, reforming and making eternally happy, as many as should throw themselves on the mercy thus tendered them, and prove the sincerity of their thankful faith, by that of their obedience? We are far from pretending to know all the reasons of a transaction, *into which even Angels desire to look* :* yet surely considerate minds may trace in it evident footsteps of holiness, goodness, wisdom : but at least humble hearts will recollect, that *the imagined foolishness of God is wiser than men* ; † and finding, as every one living must on due search, that they have no cause to glory in themselves, will glory most cordially *in the Cross of Jesus Christ* : ascribing to his intercession their forgiveness, to his strength their good actions, to his merits their reward. *Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy, God saveth us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he sheds on us abundantly through Christ Jesus our Saviour, that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs of eternal life.* ‡ Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever. §

But then we cannot be intitled to such exultation, unless we are qualified as the latter part of the text intimates. *Faith indeed saveth us* : || but that alone *which worketh by love*, ¶ to God, to our fellow-creatures, to every thing good : which cannot consist with a ruling love to the ways of an evil world. Therefore St. John saith, *If any man love the world, that is, preferably, the love of the Father* ** *is not in him* ; and St. Paul only expresses the same meaning a little more strongly, when he reminds us by his own exam-

* 1 Pet. i. 12. † 1 Cor. i. 25. ‡ Tit. iii. 5, 6, 7. § Rev. v. 13.
 || Eph. ii. 8. ¶ Gal. v. 6. ** 1 John ii. 15.

ple, that *we must be crucified*, dead, *to the world and it to us* :* we must sacrifice all inordinate fondness for it to him, who sacrificed himself on the cross for our salvation ; and mortally hate whatever is wrong in it, at the risque of being mortally hated by it. Still the comforts of life, which God hath provided for us, are to be enjoyed with duly proportioned gladness and thankfulness : the subordinations of life are to be maintained, the common business of it followed, the proprieties and civilities of it preserved, and perverse noncompliances diligently avoided. But, when all this is done, much will remain to be renounced and *crucified*. For, as St. John hath admonished us, *we are of God, and the whole world*, even what calls itself the Christian world, *lieth in wickedness* : † powerfully encouraging every bad thing, to which our appetites and passions prompt us, and many to which they do not.

Fashion makes some men missionaries of infidelity, objecting against religion, even what they know to be false : others, implicit believers in them, to shew their own freedom of thought ; and a third sort, utterly negligent of every act of piety, without so much as imagining they know why. Fashionable honour urges men to demands of satisfaction, equally wicked and absurd, often for no injury at all. Fashionable discourse abounds with oaths and imprecations, and irreverent uses of the most sacred names, not less foolish than profane ; or, if clear of this fault, commonly sets the whole of what we are concerned to believe and do in a mistaken light. Fashionable extravagance consumes in gaming, and luxury, and idle expences, what ought to provide for our families, for the worthy and the poor. Fashionable gratifications of the vari-

* Gal. vi. 14.

† 1 John v. 19.

ous pleasures of sense defeat the chief end of man's being. Even more innocent fashionable amusements swallow up the precious time, of which we should be frugal for better purposes. Fashionable hours interfere with the order of nature, with the public worship of God, with the regular dispositions of all sorts of affairs. And fashionable complaisance places the vilest of human beings on the same footing with the most unexceptionable, to the dreadful weakening of the essential distinction between good and evil.

Yet in all these matters men will follow, with strange inconsiderateness, even the profligate. But they conceive themselves fully authorized to imitate, in every thing, such as common speech calls decent and reputable: titles in some ages, to be had exceeding cheap. In one sex especially, and the other is copying after it, very small remnants, even of moral virtue, will suffice: and in the upper part of both, yet less of religion, if any at all, is needful. Accordingly many, who, from conscience, preserve some forms of it, rather look desirous to have them thought mere forms, and are wonderfully shy of uttering a word to shew the contrary: pass off any mention of their regard to it as slightly as may be, and are content to let others treat it with as much indignity as they will: instead of *glorying in the cross of Christ, ashamed to confess him before men*, though he hath passed on that shame so awful a sentence;* and perfectly indifferent whether piety hath the support, which they must know it wants, provided they can make an acceptable figure to those around them; a point about which they are as solicitous, as if the Apostle had said, *Be ye conformed to this world*, instead of *Be ye not*.† Perhaps

* Matth. x. 32. 33. Mark viii. 38. Luke ix. 26. xii. 8, 9.

† Rom. xii. 2.

the more seriously educated scruple going at once the utmost length of the mode in wrong things: but are gradually familiarized to follow their leaders from one step to another, till they advance imperceptibly to a frightful distance from their first setting out; and it may be at last grow ambitious of being leaders in their turn of a little world of their own, that shall tempt the great one into still worse enormities.

Through the whole of this giddy progress, innumerable attentions, and incredibly earnest ones, to most insignificant matters, fill their hearts, and expell or deaden every devout and virtuous feeling. If they find leisure to reflect on their conduct, it is chiefly to invent excuses and palliations: if they still go to church, it is without desire of improving there: nay if they still pray in private, which probably few of them continue long, it is little more than repeating thoughtlessly a few good words: and thus, by degrees, they come to have no real affection or veneration for their Creator, their Redeemer, their Sanctifier, no penitent sense of their own imperfections, or transgressions, no practical or steady persuasion of future recompences; but from their whole manner of talking and judging, as if the present state were all: are extremely eager about their worldly interests and pleasures, but equally unconcerned about the rightness of their dispositions: will on no account be absent from a meeting for business which they have at heart, or a gay assembly to which they are invited, let their health or what will suffer; but neglect the appointed seasons of divine worship, on the poorest pretences, or without any: crowd business, journeys, diversions, into the most sacred seasons, contrary to the excellent ends of their institution, contrary to all law, and all shame; but would think their reputations undone by going to the house of God at

any unusual time, or even making, with seriousness, a momentary acknowledgment to him over their daily food: consult neither Scripture nor reason to discover their duty; but make the artfullest use of either, to fence against what they are unwilling to own for such; or, if need be, avowedly prefer the opinion and practice of the world to both; disdainful rebels against Heaven, but mean-spirited slaves to they scarce know whom.

Yet most of them tolerate, and perhaps approve, some appearances of religion, especially in some persons; but suspect any great reality of it, as a degree of madness: have the utmost terrors of seeing this poor land over-run with enthusiasm and superstition; but not the smallest dread of profaneness and profligateness: are startled at any new declarations of authority against either, but comforted by the hope, that they will prove ineffectual, and all go on as it did: read almost any thing written to depreciate Christianity and relax moral virtue, but almost nothing in favour of them; are very cautious of meddling with treatises of piety, however judiciously composed, for fear of turning their heads, but devour ever so many idle and even lascivious books, without the least apprehension of corrupting their hearts: allow themselves to be much more expensive in the vain-glorious display of private magnificence, or towards the support of entertainments called polite, though neither of good tendency nor good taste, than liberal to the truest charities: or, how bountiful soever to the temporal distresses of their brethren, have no compassion at all for their spiritual wants: nay, perhaps, have made formal resolutions of giving nothing to such and such pious uses, against which it is grown customary to inveigh, and hear no answer.

Yet many of them had originally no relish for this

turn of thinking and acting: indeed still rather affect to seem, than really are, happy in it: nay possibly feel tormenting doubts from time to time, how it will end. But these they are taught to consider as mere fits of gloominess, which they must dissipate by every mirthful avocation they can invent, and learn to despise themselves for ever having been in so strange a state of mind, and so unsuitable to living in good company. Or, if reflection will, notwithstanding, be troublesome, arguments must be sought for to quiet it. And accordingly they do argue, that mens stations, connexions, and spirits require some relaxation, and they must take such as they can get, amongst those with whom it is to be had. But are they grieved or rejoiced at this pleaded obligation? Do they stop at the quantity or the kinds that are really needful, or go beyond them at pleasure? Are they growing better or worse all the while? Are they setting good examples or bad? Surely these are material questions. Yet they make a shift either to feel or to acknowledge nothing of their force; but whatever they like to join in, peremptorily insist, that it is harmless, useful, necessary, just what they please: yet reserving a liberty, when once it loses credit, to censure it as absurd and wrong every way, and be full as fond of something else, that deserves it as little, without confessing the least inconstancy.

For, with the world on their side, they come at length instead of apologizing for themselves, to assume a sovereign authority over others; confute their objections with barely a contemptuous laugh or look, or by fixing on them any name in vogue, that denotes preciseness; attack and persecute the most silent nonconformists to their notion, and haughtily over-

bear all that stand in their way. Such as worship the same idol with them, be their characters ever so doubtful, must not be suspected; be they ever so notoriously criminal, must not be condemned; or counted unfit for their familiar acquaintance, or even particular friendship, let the consequences, private or public, be what they may. The pert ridiculers of religion and virtue are to be allowed abundance of wit in the silliest and grossest things they utter: and the most hard-hearted libertines must be held to have true good-nature, because they have superficial gaiety. If they ruin themselves by their vices, they are only to be pitied: if others also they are to be excused to the very utmost, it is well if not looked on as the more considerable. But men who have always been regularly virtuous are to be regarded as objects of derision. And such as add to their virtue inward religion, regulate their conduct by it, abstain from things on account of it, appear to take pleasure in its doctrines, its ordinances, its promises, and give any tokens of what the text calls *glorying in the cross of Christ*, they are to hope from this quarter for a very small share of the charitable candour, which is lavished so profusely on others. Their sincerity, or their understanding, is to be strongly questioned: their good dispositions and actions denied, or passed over in silence, or scornfully undervalued: ridiculous and dangerous singularities to be imputed to them, on the weakest evidence, or none; and if ever they fall into any such, they are to be aggravated beyond truth or credibility; and no plea whatever to be admitted in their favour. So very far are too many from answering the Psalmist's description of the man *who shall dwell in God's holy hill, that in his eyes a vile*

*person is contemned, but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.**

Even an infidel, were he to speak honestly, would tell such, that they are no Christians. Yet, perhaps, they would be very angry with any one but an infidel for saying so, and in reality are by no means unbelievers. But why then will they not become consistent? If the Gospel of Christ deserves any regard at all, it deserves a thorough regard: either it is nothing, or it is the most important of all things. And they who profess it, yet seldom think of it, who are influenced by it, if at all, to scarce more than a little outward shew, and slight and scorn the frame of mind which it was intended to create in them, *better had it been for them, unless they amend, never to have known it.†* All sorts of persons are concerned beyond expression to recollect this often: but two sorts beyond the rest. If you of the upper part of the world, who have most to be thankful and most to be answerable for, instead of being exemplary in serving God, are remarkable for neglecting his worship and his laws; not only the ingratitude, but the perniciousness of your behaviour, will greatly increase your punishment. And if we of the clergy, who teach others by our exhortations to *set their affection on things above, not on things on the earth,‡* teach them the reverse by our practice: make it our study to acquire applause, or wealth, or power, or rank, to partake of amusements and diversions in the poor low degree that for shame we can, or enjoy ourselves in some graver kind of voluptuous indolence; to do any thing, in short, but labour diligently in God's vineyard from first to last for the good of souls;

* Ps. xv. 1. 4.

† 2 Pet. ii. 21.

‡ Col. iii. 2.

we shall receive a double condemnation. And they who patronize any such of us, will share deeply in our guilt.

It is not rigour that dictates any of these assertions to me. It was not austerity, but the tenderest compassion, that moved St. Paul to say, *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, who mind earthly things* :* not always designed enemies, but real ones however. Our Saviour hath told us, *He that is not with me, is against me*.† And they that will be with him to effect, must be with him heartily, openly, and uniformly. We may have qualities very amiable, and do actions very laudable in the estimation of men, and yet our hearts be far from *right in the sight of God*.‡ He requires, as well he may, that we should consider ourselves principally as his creatures, as sinners, as favoured with offers of mercy and of grace, as bound to *live soberly, righteously, and godly, looking for the blessed hope of his glorious appearance*.§ However the preference, which the world gives to very different matters, may buoy us up now in overlooking these, it will be no protection to us, when *the dead, small and great, shall stand before God*.|| And however insipid or insupportable a life may appear to some, which is to be humbly spent in regulating their desires, doing their duty and expecting their reward ; they will find upon trial, that every other scheme produces miserable disappointments ; and this, as much happiness as our present state is capable of. Length of days, easy circumstances, general esteem, domestic tranquillity, national good order and strength, are the smaller ad-

* Phil. iii. 18, 19. † Matth. xii. 30. Luke xi. 23. ‡ Acts viii. 21.
§ Tit. ii. 12, 13. || Rev. xx. 12.

vantages that usually attend practising the rules of religion : but the constant ones, the calm peace and joyful prospects of all whose minds are duly affected by the genuine principles of it, these are blessings inexpressibly great.

You are not exhorted to begin a new course of life, and retain your old inclinations ; making yourselves uneasy, without making yourselves better : but to acquire such sentiments, that you may delight in all you do. The vigorous exercise of good sense will contribute not a little to this desirable end ; for, indeed, the ways of the world are often flat contradictions to it. But the fundamental rule is, learn a just value for the cross of Christ, for the pity he hath shewn, the pardon he hath purchased, the felicity he hath provided for you ; and you will soon come to love the restraints and observances which he hath appointed, to look with indifference, or sometimes with disgust and abhorrence, on what you have hitherto admired, and find the degree of your satisfactions unspeakably increased, by changing the nature of them from trifling, disgraceful and noxious, to rational, noble and beneficent. Still difficulties there will be, and to some persons peculiar ones, in breaking settled habits, and dissolving the ties by which you have been long held. But God will give you both courage and prudence, to make it easier than you think. Though you will do what is right with steadiness, yet you will do it without ostentation, and with chearful good-humour : speak mildly of others, and keep on as good terms with all men as you safely can. But, if you are too solicitous to please them, you will gradually slide back, and forget, as thousands have done to their eternal ruin, your former convictions. Therefore, whenever you feel any, suffer them not to die away through inattention,

or be choaked by cares and pleasures, or blasted by the breath of scoffers : but impress them on your souls immediately and frequently, form resolutions corresponding to them, and confirm these by reading good books, by the conversation and countenance of good persons, by attendance on God's public ordinances ; but especially by fervent private prayer, suited to your spiritual condition. With this, *out of weakness you will be made strong* :* and without this, the seemingly firmest human purposes, think as highly of them as you will, can never be effectual. *For God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.*†

* Heb. xi. 34.

† Jam. iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5.

S E R M O N XX.

COL. iii. 1, 2.

IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.

SET YOUR AFFECTION ON THINGS ABOVE, NOT ON THINGS ON THE EARTH.

THIS day we are met to celebrate the yearly memorial of our blessed Lord's rising from the dead. Now the genuine method of paying honour to every article of our Creed is allowing it the proper influence on our hearts and lives. Christ's resurrection is vain with respect to us, unless we be raised by it to the faith of a better world; and the firmest faith of that is vain also, unless it excites us to love and *seek the things which are above*. This passage of St. Paul therefore is justly made one principal part of our Easter Day's service: and the degree of our practical regard to it will be the true measure of our improvement by the discipline of the past season, and of God's acceptance of our celebration of the present. That each of these then may be such, as we are concerned beyond expression that it should, I shall lay before you the chief motives to a due regulation of our desires and behaviour, in relation to earthly and heavenly objects, which motives arise from considering ourselves,

I. As rational beings:

II. As believers in God :

III. As disciples of Christ : on which last point I shall enlarge the most, as it deserves.

I. Let us consider ourselves merely as rational beings, who are to live for a while on earth ; and suppose that we had no farther prospect. Then indeed we could not *set our affections on things above* : but still we might set them a great deal too much on things below. For, if our attachments to worldly objects be strong, we shall frequently, either pursue what is hurtful, or be miserable that we dare not pursue it, or enraged at being crossed in our designs, or dejected on finding small happiness in our attainments : which indeed are incapable of yielding much. The delights of sense are destructive, when indulged to excess : and low and inconsiderable, when conducted with moderation. Wealth and power and rank are acquired with much difficulty, attended with much anxiety, and soon become familiar and tasteless. Fondness for gay amusements rather makes men uneasy when they are without them, than gives any mighty pleasure in the midst of them : and, unless they manage with uncommon prudence, wastes their fortunes, wears out their spirits, hurts their characters, exposes them to contempt. Indeed we cannot help on reflection contemning ourselves, for setting our hearts on any of these gratifications, to the neglect of matters visibly worthier. But if we follow them to the loss of our innocence, which generally happens when we follow them earnestly, then we have cause to hate ourselves too, for transgressing the dictates of that inward principle which we feel ought to rule us, and which rewards us when obeyed, with that pleasing consciousness of having acted well, which is the truest satisfaction we can taste, though all were to end at death.

But even from this enjoyment, without the aid of religion, we can promise ourselves but little. Our failures and imperfections in virtue must be daily mortified: our rightest and kindest behaviour will often have ill returns made to it: they whom we love with the most deserved affection, may be miserable, or may be snatched from us: and if not, we must very soon leave them, and whatever we value. In such circumstances, disengagement is evidently the only way of securing any comfort. It will indeed, at the same time render our condition flat and insipid: but we can aim at nothing better from the things of this world, without meeting with something worse: and if we are not contented with such a state, (as in truth how can we?) our sole remedy is to look beyond it: and consider ourselves,

II. Not merely as happening to be inhabitants of the dust of earth for a few years, we know not how or why, but as created by the power and placed under the authority and protection, of a perfectly wise, and holy, and good Being, who hath made us capable of knowing and honouring, and therefore doubtless originally of imitating and obeying, him. On this farther view of things it will plainly appear, that the principle of conscience, which otherwise might often serve only to perplex and disquiet men, is the law of God written in their souls; and therefore that yielding to it will always end well: generally in this world, but certainly in another; for which human nature was evidently framed. Here then the distinction between *things above* and *things on earth* begins to open, the connection of virtue with happiness becomes manifest; and excites us to despise the poor short-lived advantages that little minds are fond of; to esteem and practise what is right, be it ever so difficult, or ever so

unfashionable, and devote our intire existence to the adorable author of it. The principal object, beyond comparison, of one who believes in God, must surely be God himself: and our reverence and love, our dependence and trust, are so to be placed on him, as on nothing else in his whole creation. But, above all, should these affections be exerted towards him in respect of that future recompence which we hope to receive from him. And we are greatly deficient in prudence, as well as gratitude, if we make not that expectation the support and the delight of our lives. But then the temper of Heaven must be formed in us here, or we can never enjoy it hereafter: and therefore, if we would fix our hearts on any thing above to good purpose, we must fix them on resembling him who dwells there, in purity and benevolent goodness. Cultivation of these dispositions is both an appointed requisite, and a necessary preparative for our supreme felicity: whereas immersing ourselves in cares, or dissipating ourselves in pleasures, unrelated to piety and virtue, were they ever so harmless to those around us, must be pernicious to ourselves; rendering our minds either gross and sensual, or trifling and vain; unfit for the enjoyment of spiritual bliss. Every believer then, were it only of so much as nature teaches, must think it his primary concern to cherish religious sentiments. And though he were uncertain of the truth of his belief, yet, in a case of such infinite importance, there could be no doubt of his obligation to chuse the safer side. But, without farther guidance, though he were not under that necessity, he must be subject to others, and very alarming ones. It doth not appear to the eye of unassisted reason, what degree, or what duration, of future happiness we might promise ourselves, even were we innocent: much less what sinners,

as we all are, abundantly worse than most of us think, have to expect from the Lord and Judge of all, to the honour of whose government repentance and amendment alone may be no adequate satisfaction, were they in our power, which persons left to themselves have too much experience that they are not ; yet however, since we are very sure, that right sentiments and behaviour must make every man's condition better, and wrong ones worse than it would be else ; looking up to God, with sorrow for our transgressions, with thankfulness for his mercy hitherto, and humble hope for it hereafter, must be the duty and the interest even of those who have no other light than their own understandings can afford them. But still the obscurity of their prospect must greatly diminish both their consolation from it, and its good influence upon them, and fill them with dreadful terrors from time to time. God be thanked, therefore, that we are not left in the darkness of natural religion, but blest with that view of the things above which proceeds from considering ourselves,

III. As the disciples of Christ. If the Gospel of Jesus be true, and we have innumerable demonstrations of it, then there is full evidence, that a future state of eternal happiness beyond expression is attainable by faith in our dear Redeemer, notwithstanding our past sins, notwithstanding our present infirmities. For, having purchased for us life by his death, he hath given us assurance of it by his resurrection, and, in effect, raised up us at the same time with himself. *If then we be thus risen with Christ, where shall our hearts be, but where our treasure is ;** fixed on him, whose compassion planned the scheme of our salvation ; on him whose love executed it ; on him whose grace

* Matth. vi. 21. Luke xii. 34.

enables us to share in it ; on that kingdom of glory, in which we shall reign after death ; on those heavenly doctrines and precepts, by which we are to prepare ourselves for it in the mean while ? That we *walk not by sight, but by faith* ;* that we *labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to eternal life* ;† that we *love not the world, neither the things that are in the world*,‡ but have our *conversation in Heaven*,§ as *fellow-citizens of the saints, and members of the household of God*.||

There is a possibility indeed of taking such exhortations in too strict a sense, for want of observing, that rules, which we are apt to neglect and explain away, must be expressed in very strong terms to prevent this : and that often in Scripture, when one thing is commanded, and another seemingly prohibited, the prohibition is not intended to be absolute, but comparative : as in the known instance, *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice* :¶ when yet sacrificing was both lawful and enjoined ; but still to be looked on as forbidden, if it came in competition with a precept of more importance. Thus then we are to interpret the direction of withdrawing our hearts from this earth. Not that we should lay aside the common affairs of life, in order to spend our whole time in devotion : diligence in these affairs is one great duty of our *heavenly calling*.** Not that we are restrained from using the good creatures of God with pleasure : for he hath *created them to be received with thanksgiving*,†† and *given us richly all things to enjoy*.‡‡ Not that we are to confine ourselves to mere necessities ; for undeterminable scruples would arise, what are necessities ; and as

* 2 Cor. v. 7. † John vi. 27. ‡ 1 John ii. 15. § Phil. iii. 20.
 || Eph. ii. 19. ¶ Hos. vi. 6. Matth. ix. 13. xii. 7. ** Heb. iii. 1.
 †† 1 Tim. iv. 3. ‡‡ 1 Tim. vi. 17.

Heaven hath provided us more, it would be only perverseness or weakness, to refuse taking it. Not that industry to raise and better our worldly condition is blameable ; for a blessing from above is promised to such industry. Not that we are to live in a perpetual fright, because it is doubtful, how far precisely we may gratify our natural desires in this thing or that : for we serve a gracious Master, who means that we should be always cheerful and easy in his service, so long as to the best of our judgments we are faithful in it. Not that we are to think even the gayer accomplishments of life sinful : but rather choose to make virtue and piety more amiable by them ; provided it be only virtue and piety that we adorn with them. Not that we are bound altogether to decline amusements and diversions, in which others are immoderate, unless example to them, or danger to ourselves, requires it : for their abuse doth not of necessity make our use of them unlawful, nor possibly sometimes unexpedient. Not that we are to measure the degree of our goodness by that of our austerities and abstinences : *for, if I may make a small change in the Apostle's words, neither if we eat not, are we the better ; nor if we eat, are we the worse.** *The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.†* Much less are we to censure persons of a free behaviour : for conscientious watchfulness is very consistent with an unconstrained appearance ; and though John the Baptist, an excellent man, was rigid and strict ; yet our blessed Lord, much the superior character, *came eating and drinking, and conversed familiarly, as a friend, with publicans and sinners.‡*

Again : in like manner we are to interpret the

* 1 Cor. viii. 8.

† Rom. xiv. 17.

‡ Matth. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34.

direction of *setting our affections on things above*. Not that we must keep, or strive to keep, our thoughts as intent upon them continually, as we possibly can: for neither our condition here, nor indeed our frame, will bear it: which wants daily relaxation as much as nightly rest; and without it, our spirits will be overcome, our health impaired, our temper soured; and, by consequence, more ground lost in our way to Heaven than we hoped to gain. Not that we should doubt of our spiritual state, if the movements of our souls towards God, and our delight in the contemplation of future happiness, be attended with but little warmth and passion; for though strong religious feelings are perfectly rational, and extremely desirable, yet some tempers are moved but weakly by any thing; and what is present and strikes our senses, will on the whole, agitate most, if not all, of us more, than what is distant and spiritual. Still, if under these disadvantages, we so *love God as to keep his commandments*,* from reverent and thankful motives of duty to him, we give him that proof of our attachment, which he requires. Without this, the most fervent affections will be unavailable: and with this, the calmest, which are often the truest and most persevering, will be accepted. Nor, lastly, are men to despair on finding, that regard to a better world is not only, as an inward sentiment, much cooler, but, as a principle of action, much fainter than they have cause to wish; and the workings of earthly desires in their breasts powerful and vehement. For if the victory be obtained, the reward shall be in proportion to the toil of the combat. And though it be not a complete victory, yet if it be a real one, God may enable us to *go on from strength to strength*,† till we are *in all things more*

* 1 John v. 3. † Psal. lxxxiv. 7. § Rom. viii. 37.

*than conquerors.** Or, at the worst, failings, that will diminish our recompence, may by no means forfeit it.

But though a few, who are worthy of the utmost regard, have so peculiar a seriousness and tenderness of soul, that shewing them how gentle and mild in reality the seemingly severe doctrines of Scripture are, is requisite, both to secure their peace and direct their conduct : yet the general propensity is much on the other side ; and there is most need to fear, that when once the precepts on this head have been acknowledged to signify nothing impracticable or extreme, they will soon be overlooked, as if they signified scarce any thing at all. Now, it is possible to deceive ourselves with almost whatever imagination we will : but surely it is not easy to think that a slight duty, of which the word of God speaks in such terms as you have already heard ; in such declarations as that of St. John, *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him ;*† in such parables as that of the rich man, who, not indeed merely for enjoying this life, but for taking it as his portion, and looking no farther, was irreversibly doomed to the place of torment.‡ We may very allowably, in our passage through the present world, both feel a complacency in the agreeableness of the road, and endeavour to procure good accommodations upon it : nay, by moderate attentions of this kind, prudently conducted, we may qualify ourselves the better, both for the business allotted us during our journey, and the employment for which we are designed at the conclusion of it. But if we turn aside into every flowery path, and engage in every pursuit that inclination suggests : if we forget we are travellers, consider our inns as places of abode, and adopt the land of our pilgrimage for our country : what shall we answer

* Rom. viii. 37.

† 1 John ii. 15.

‡ Luke xvi. 19, &c.

at the last to him, who hath sent us hither to do his work ; limited the time for it ; and given us the fullest warning, that our future condition depends on our present industry or negligence ?

Let us reflect, therefore, whilst it may avail us, in what manner we are going on. The bulk of mankind, it is necessary, should spend their days in worldly labours. But then it is equally necessary, that these should be undertaken from a principle of religion, conducted suitably to the laws of religion, and accompanied with the practice of religious duties, public and private. They who plead want of leisure for devotion, can always find enough for follies and sins. They who plead want of capacity or instruction, have, the meanest of them, been taught and learnt the indispensable rules of life : to believe in their Creator, their Redeemer, their Sanctifier ; to behave virtuously, love mankind, and honour God : doing which, they may offer up to him a life of the lowest occupations in sure faith of his acceptance. And if so much regard to things above be justly required even of these ; what will be the case of their superiors, who voluntarily plunge themselves so deep, either in cares or pleasures, that he who made them *is not in all their thoughts* ;* or, if they cannot help sometimes remembering him, is indolently forgotten again, or studiously driven out ? It is very true, business must be attended, but always in subordination to the one thing needful. Recreations must be allowed ; but not so as to become the great end of our being. What proportion then do our employments of real consequence bear to our trifling ones ; and what share, even of our serious hours, do we give to God, to improvement in virtue, to the contemplation of our latter end, to the hope of immor-

* Ps. x. 4.

talities? Too probably, much may be wanting to fit many of us for our final account. And how joyfully soever they who are conscious of their title to heaven, may partake of the innocent delights of earth: yet it is dreadful to see those, who must know, if they would reflect, their guilt to be unforgiven, and whose sentence, whatever they imagine, is possibly just ready to fall upon their heads, running round in a circle of thoughtless gaieties, instead of applying with penitent humility for pardon and grace.

But, indeed, were the goodness of such examined, as are conceived by others and themselves to have a great deal, would it not prove to be solely or chiefly relative to this world? We do justice and speak truth: but is it from any better motive than reputation or convenience? We pity and relieve the sick and poor: but have we a like concern for the spiritual wants of men? We are chaste and temperate perhaps: but is it because *the pure in heart shall see God*,* or to avoid expence, and disease, and disgrace? Our very sense of duty, is it of duty to the Author of our beings; or do we not consider more, what we owe to ourselves, or other men, than what we owe to him? Our obligations to our fellow-creatures we acknowledge frequently; but, except it be in a common phrase, that comes now and then out of our mouths without attending to it; when do we express any thankfulness, any subjection, any relation at all, to the Giver of every good gift? or, if we have sentiments of this kind now and then, are they vigorous, or are they languid? We bestow, it may be, freely, our money, our time, our pains, to gratify our fancies, or promote our interests, or serve our friends: what share of these do we employ to support the cause of religion, to advance the divine honour? Temporal

* Matth. v. 8.

disappointments fill us with the deepest sorrow : but do even transgressions, and especially do failings and imperfections in Christian virtues, affect us in any degree approaching to it ? And would not a considerable solicitude on such an account appear to some of us, who are far from thinking themselves void of religion, rather an evidence of a disordered mind, than a well-grounded concern ? Prospects of temporal advantage elate us with the highest joy : do we experience equal satisfaction, though we ought to experience much greater, from the hopes of eternal blessedness ? We are usually very ambitious of making as good a figure as we possibly can in our present state : what desire do we shew of obtaining an honourable distinction in the next ? Instead of this, we seem careful to exclude all reflection on future existence. When we speak of the death of an acquaintance, when we put the supposition of our own, how commonly do we consider it, as if nothing whatever were to follow after, and how seldom as an introduction to an infinitely more important life ! Are we not indeed, some how or other, ashamed to mention, as if it were improper, our faith in a judgment to come, as a reason against sin, a motive to holiness, a support under affliction ; or to acknowledge ourselves influenced by it in any one article of conduct ? Or, if we do admit another state to suggest itself to us, perhaps we think more of Hell with slavish terror, than of Heaven with filial gratitude. Nay, even when we think of Heaven, too commonly, if the truth were known, we have extremely faint wishes for it, or inclinations towards it. Yet, we can neither attain it, nor enjoy it, without loving it : and to love it in deed, we must love purity and benevolence, the company of good men, the worship of God : love to celebrate the praises of him that sits on the

throne, and the Lamb at his right hand: to meditate on the mercy of our heavenly Father, the condescension and the glories of his eternal Son, the gracious inspirations of his holy Spirit; our miserable condition by nature, our blessed one through the Gospel of Christ, our prospect of improving in pious and virtuous affection to all eternity. Now these, it may be feared, are the things of all others, that the thoughts of many of us dwell on least, and with the least satisfaction: yet we call ourselves Christians, and hope to be saved.

Nor must it be denied, that great imperfection in spiritual desires may be consistent with a state of acceptance. But the farther such desires come short of their due vigour, the weaker evidence we shall have of what we are most concerned to know: the nearer they advance towards it, the greater will be our comfort and help from above; for *to him that hath, shall be given* :* and though, from natural causes, they may sink, without danger, beneath what they once were, in sensible warmth, yet if their practical effects begin to lessen, it should be an alarming admonition, to *remember from whence we are fallen, and repent and do our first works* ;† *to be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die*.‡

The methods to restore, to preserve and heighten our devout breathings towards *the Father of Spirits*,§ and the place of his abode, are these: that we appoint, and resolutely secure to ourselves frequent seasons for examining and rectifying those wrong apprehensions of things which our own corrupt natures, the commerce of the world, and the suggestions of the wicked

* Matth. xiii. 12. † Rev. ii. 5. ‡ Ib. iii. 2. § Heb. xii. 9.

one are so apt to give us : that then we recollect the vanity, instability, and momentary duration, of every earthly good, the certainty of the unseen state, the eternal continuance of its joys and sufferings, the inseparable connection of the one or the other with our present sentiments and behaviour ; the authority and holiness of God, our own frailty, guilt, and weakness ; the sacrifice and resurrection, the ascension and intercession of our blessed Mediator ; and when we have filled our souls with these great truths, lay open the workings of them before the Lord of all, in suitable confessions, petitions, and praises : that, if we find not at first the pleasure or the benefit we wish from such exercises, we persevere in them notwithstanding ; yet so as not to let them become, either on the one hand empty forms, or on the other unnecessary burthens ; but employ them discreetly, as means to arrive at our end : that we assist our devotions and reflections chiefly by the inimitable Spirit that breathes in the Holy Scriptures : but also by the use of other good books, and religious conversation, judiciously chosen : that we abstain conscientiously, as far as we can, from every thing, of every sort, which we find hath a tendency to corrupt or deaden our hearts ; but particularly that we shelter our tender piety from the blasts of scoffers with the utmost caution ; indeed rather hide it from their knowledge, than expose it to their ridicule, yet never deny ourselves to be what we are : that we constantly attend the public service of God, not as matter of custom or entertainment, but with a faithful care to join fervently in his worship, to learn meekly from his word, and cherish by reflection afterwards whatever good impressions we have felt at the time : that we statedly come to the holy table with due preparation,

vow peculiarly, in partaking of it, *to live by the faith of the Son of God* ;* and, as we profess uniting ourselves to him by means of it, remember, that *he who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit*.† Nor should we consider only the duty of being heavenly-minded, but also its advantages. We shall cease to fear death in proportion as we set our affections on what is to follow it ; and *have hope, as an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the vail, whither the forerunner is entered for us*.‡ We shall scorn to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, if we have respect to the recompence of reward ; bear whatever sufferings our Christian obedience may expose us to, *as seeing him, who is invisible*.§ We shall take joyfully the loss of worldly goods, knowing we have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.|| When we are deprived of our dearest friends, we shall refrain our voice from weeping, and our eyes from tears, for our work shall be rewarded, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.¶ We shall run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, who endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.** The more we contemplate him, the more we shall love him, the more we shall consequently feel we are beloved by him. And when once we have tasted, that the Lord is gracious,†† we shall be filled with all joy and peace in believing, and abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost,‡‡ till we can say experimentally with the Psalmist, *I am alway by*

* Gal. ii. 20.

† 1 Cor. vi. 17.

‡ Heb. vi. 19, 20.

§ Ib. xi. 25, 26, 27.

|| Ib. x. 34.

¶ Jer. xxxi. 16.

** Heb. xii. 1, 2.

†† 1 Pet. ii. 3.

‡‡ Rom. xv. 13.

*thee : thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and after that receive me with glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee. My flesh and my heart faileth : but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.**

* Ps. lxxiii. 22—25.

S E R M O N XXI.

1 JOHN ii. 7, 8.

BRETHREN, I WRITE NO NEW COMMANDMENT UNTO YOU, BUT AN OLD COMMANDMENT, WHICH YE HAD FROM THE BEGINNING: THE OLD COMMANDMENT IS THE WORD, WHICH YE HAVE HEARD FROM THE BEGINNING.

AGAIN, A NEW COMMANDMENT I WRITE UNTO YOU: WHICH THING IS TRUE IN HIM AND IN YOU; BECAUSE THE DARKNESS IS PAST, AND THE TRUE LIGHT NOW SHINETH.

THESE words contain a very useful piece of instruction, expressed in a manner somewhat obscure and enigmatical, on purpose to excite that attention, which they will soon reward by the discovery of their meaning. Probably they were designed to be more especially understood of the great precept, inculcated immediately after them, of universal good-will: an original duty of mankind, but strangely forgotten throughout the earth, till our Saviour taught it more clearly and enforced it more strongly than had ever been done before. Yet they are equally applicable to the whole of Christianity: and it might very well be the Apostle's meaning to extend them so far, and set forth in them a truth, wonderfully fitted to give both a just and engaging notion of the Gospel: that its general purpose is to make men happy by restoring amongst them the belief and

practice of the primitive universal religion of rational beings ; that its peculiar doctrines were all introduced by the change of human circumstances, and are the same in substance with those, of which the Patriarchs and Jews received imperfect notices, and typical representations in antient time ; that being thus, in respect of God's early promulgation of it, an *old commandment* ; it was yet, with respect to the age in which our Saviour republished it, a *new* one ; as *darkness* had covered the world which by his means was driven away ; and the *light* of truth displayed again, with a brightness and reviving warmth till then unknown. For Christianity added much evidence and distinctness to many important, and many comfortable articles of faith ; and then building on them the corresponding obligations of duty, completed on the old foundations a structure, only so far new as the state of mankind required it should be. This is, doubtless, an advantageous view of the Christian dispensation ; representing it as doing for us exactly what we needed to have done ; and that it is likewise a just view of it, I shall endeavour to shew, by laying before you,

- The nature of religion as it stood at first.
- The condition of mankind afterwards : and
- The fitness of the Gospel to that condition.

The duty of man, so far as it was discoverable to him by reason, whilst he continued innocent, must consist in love, honour, and obedience, to his Maker, Benefactor, and Sovereign Lord, joined with the care of copying the divine goodness in his behaviour to his fellow-creatures, and the divine holiness in the rational government of himself. It is plain, that he could be obliged to no more, unless God was pleased, by revelation, to superadd more ; and as plain, that he was obliged to the whole of this. For to pretend reverence

to our Father in Heaven, yet to misuse his children and our brethren on earth: or to behave with affection, dutifulness and gratitude amongst them, and yet shew none to him; and to profess both a righteous and godly life, yet to fail of the obligations of a sober one, contradicting and debasing reason by brutal excesses and irregularities, is evidently faulty and inconsistent. The same regard to truth and right, which requires any of these things, requires them all. So that neither piety and morals can be separated from each other, nor any part of either from the rest: but the whole hath one foundation: and is indeed one temper of mind, only exerted towards different objects. In this happy rectitude of heart and behaviour, consists the image of God, the perfection of man, the original religion of all creatures, capable of religion, throughout the universe.

Supposing, therefore, any creature fallen from this blessed state, restoring him to it again must be the only ultimate end to which any useful endeavours of his own, or any gracious designs of Heaven for his good, can be directed. Now, this is our case. We are fallen, by the fault of our first parents transgressing an easy revealed commandment, superadded very justly to the natural ones, as a further trial of their obedience: we are fallen, I say, thus from uprightness of nature and immortality: and we feel convincing effects of that melancholy change. We are also fallen, by our own fault, lower still, from personal innocence into personal guilt; and from this condition we want to be recovered. But that we cannot be, nor desire to be, till we are sensible of our misery and danger, and sorry for the sins that have reduced us to so wretched a condition. Here then begins the necessity of repentance: a duty for which there

was no room in the primitive state of things ; but in ours, the ground-work of all that we have to hope for. And this duty comprehends, not only that we condemn ourselves of folly, for having acted contrary to our interests ; and of baseness, for having violated the dictates of our inward sense of virtue ; but of ill desert in disobeying God. The grief and shame attending repentance will vary in their expression, according to the variety of mens natural constitutions. But disapprobation of sin, and care of amendment, are necessary proofs of its genuineness. And to these the offender is absolutely bound, how small soever his hope of pardon may be. For having done amiss can, in no circumstances, justify the neglect of doing better : and every increase of guilt must be expected to increase the punishment.

But, still, as our spirit and vigour in acting will be proportionable to the encouragement on which we act : without some good prospect of forgiveness and acceptance, men would have so little heart to go through the difficulties of reformation, that scarce any regard to religion would be preserved in the world. And therefore God hath enabled us, by the mere use of reason, to conclude it probable, that as goodness is always the object of his favour, so whenever we return to it really, though imperfectly, he will look on us anew, with tenderness and complacence. For *like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him ; for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust.** But then, whether it be consistent with the holiness of his nature, and the honour of his government, that repentance should obtain pardon in all cases, or in which ; and whether in any, without

* Psalm ciii. 13. 14.

some admonitory and exemplary correction first ; and how severe such correction may be ; though it nearly concerns us, who can say, unless knowledge be given him from above ?

Another point, of great importance to fallen and sinful man, is this. Partly by the original depravation of our nature, partly by our actual transgressions, the strength of the human mind is grievously weakened, and we find in ourselves a sad inability of doing, what yet we know we ought to do, and were made for, and cannot become happy without doing. Now what shall relieve us here ? When indeed we contemplate God's continual providence and care, even over the meanest of his works, and reflect that the improvement of his rational creatures in piety and virtue must be the principal end of his creation ; we cannot but hope, that he will condescend to assist us in it ; inspire us with good purposes, and direct and strengthen us in the execution of them. But still hope is not certainty : and the weaker our hope is, the fainter will our efforts be : and whether, after great and habitual sins, we may promise ourselves the aid of his spirit at all, though then we need it most, reason cannot judge on any certain grounds.

A third most material article, on which it throws a little light, but a light greatly overcast with clouds and doubts, is that of a future state. Considering the immortal nature of man's soul, the evident capacity it hath for much higher degrees of knowledge and virtue, than it ever attains here ; and the earnest desires of a future being, which the wisest and best men feel beyond others : considering the many miseries to which we are subject in this life, the few and low enjoyments of which we are capable, and the strange disproportion with which both are divided ; while the

good too frequently suffer every thing that is terrible for the sake of their goodness ; and the bad very commonly obtain the utmost prosperity by the means of their wickedness : men have never failed in any age of the world to entertain some expectations of a better and more equal state hereafter. But how long or how short its duration will be, how great or how small its reward, and what qualifications will intitle us to any, and what share of them ; our unassisted faculties only guess : and the subject appears in a very great measure to lie out of our reach.

But the divine mercy gave additional hopes to men from the very beginning, beyond what reason was able to furnish ; with useful, though general and obscure, intimations of the means, by which these hopes were to be accomplished. Our first parents were told, that the *seed of the woman should bruise the head*, and destroy the power, of that *Serpent*,* which had brought into the world sin and death. Sacrifices were accepted, as early as the days of Abel. Enoch, for his piety, though undoubtedly not a faultless one, was translated to a happier life. Noah was assured, that the *spirit of God strove with men*† to reform them. And these reviving truths, possibly with many more circumstances and evidences of them, were certainly propagated amongst all Noah's children : of which there remain clear and numerous footsteps in the following ages.

But by degrees negligence and wickedness introduced ignorance and superstition : and these in their turn augmented negligence and wickedness : till the Patriarchal doctrines were forgotten or perverted ; the spiritual worship of God laid aside for idolatry ; and his nature and perfections so grossly misunder-

* Gen. iii. 15.

† Ib. vi. 3.

stood, that it is no wonder if pardon of sins, assistance in right conduct, and a recompence after death, were either not thought of, or expected on conditions absurd, and even immoral. For the knowledge of the commonest duties of life was in many cases utterly lost; and shocking crimes considered as perfectly lawful, nay exalted into acts of religion. Thus then did the nations of the earth, to speak in the language of St. Paul, *walk in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God.**

Suppose now any one to have made it his business, in this lamentable state of things, to teach men their duty to God, their fellow-creatures, and themselves; and to have given them only such instruction in it, with such hopes of acceptance and recompence, as the mere light of nature could afford: what a publisher of good tidings, what a noble benefactor to mankind, would such a one have been! And had he further appointed a number of his followers to travel through every land, combat the reigning errors and follies, establish the truth in their stead, and settle a succession of men to support it for ever; how highly would the institution, and the author of it, have been honoured by the well-disposed throughout the earth! But no person appeared, who had either abilities to execute, or greatness of mind to conceive, so vast and excellent a design. The founders, lawgivers, and rulers, of kingdoms and commonwealths, if they studied the temporal welfare of those under their care, for which they often provided very injudiciously, had little farther regard even to their morals, and to their religion scarce any at all: but patronized and set up whatever form of it, either the people were accustomed to ob-

* Eph. iv. 17, 18.

serve ; or their own fancy, or the example of their neighbours, happened to suggest. So that there was not, for many ages, in all the known countries of the Gentile world, a single instance of rational public worship of the true God. Then for the philosophers ; most of them spent the chief of their time in speculations, that had small connection with virtue and piety. And they who did turn their minds to examine into the obligations and the hopes of men had very imperfect, very erroneous, notions of both ; tolerated, and even applauded, great sins ; had scarce any notion at all, either of inward humility, or of repentance towards God ; were very wavering, to say no worse, in their belief of future rewards ; and had yet less apprehensions of future punishments. Besides, they differed from one another in most material points, but all agreed in conforming to whatever false worship was established : and, had they held more truth than they did, were so little regarded, in any thing right, by the generality of their fellow-citizens ; that they confined their discourses to a small number of their private disciples, and left the multitude to live and die like the beasts that perish. This undeniably was, and had long been, the case, when Christianity appeared. And though human reason might have taught men more than it did ; yet they, whom it did not, were never the better for that possibility . nor was there any likelihood of its becoming fact.

Such was the condition of the Gentiles. That of the Jews in the mean time was very different, but became at length almost as bad. They had received, from their ancestor Abraham, further notices of God's gracious intentions. They had received, from their legislator Moses, a great blessing, an authorised written system of true religion and moral virtue ; with

additional precepts, to preserve them from idolatry, separate them from the nations that professed it, and exhibit to them a more particular, but dark, representation of good things to come, which would naturally engage their attention and expectation all along; and, being explained when God saw fit, would shew, that the purpose, which he executed in later times, he had formed in the earliest. After this, they received from a long succession of prophets, ampler and more spiritual instructions, fuller assurances of God's forgiveness and grace, clearer notifications of a future state, and more circumstantial accounts of an extraordinary person to arise from the family of David, by whom all the divine blessings were to be conveyed to all the world, on the condition of believing and obeying him.

These undoubtedly were great advantages. Yet for a long time, notwithstanding them all, they were continually associating idols with the true God, and even the vilest parts of heathen worship with his. And when they came to profess a stricter adherence to their own religion, they grievously perverted the most essential articles of it. They worked themselves into a hatred of other nations, against whom they were indeed commanded to be on their guard, but still to love them. They promised themselves a temporal deliverer, to establish for their benefit an universal kingdom of this world: instead of one to free them from sin and death. They neglected the weightier, the moral parts of their law; and grew so minutely and absurdly observant of the ceremonial, that at length they imagined their whole duty to God consisted in outward forms; by a scrupulous practice of which, they conceited themselves to merit every thing from him, without any one good quality within.

When therefore the wisdom of the wisest nations had proved foolishness, and the piety of the best instructed sadly degenerated into superstition, our heavenly Father mercifully and seasonably sent forth his Son, to renew *the old Commandment which was in the beginning*, to perfect those additions to it which the alteration of human circumstances had required, and perpetuate the knowledge of the whole to the end of time.

That the ultimate design of Christianity is re-establishing the love of God, the love of men, the love of virtue, is obviously plain from the whole New Testament: particularly, from our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount; from his answer to the question, *Which is the great Commandment in the law* :* from St. James's declaration, what is *pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father* :† from St. Paul's Discourse to the Athenians: from his observation, that *love is the end of the Commandment* :‡ from his explicit assertion, that the *grace of God appeared* for this purpose, to *teach all men, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world, looking for the glorious hope*§ of a better. And the re-establishment, which the Gospel hath made in this respect, is perfect. It requires such love of God, as will incline us effectually to imitate, as well as honour him; such love of men, as extends to the whole world, and seeks both the temporal and the spiritual good of all; such love of virtue, as is free from ostentation, from austerity, from self-opinion. It lays us under a necessity of remembering, that we are frail, that we are sinners; and therefore most firmly bound to humility in

* Matth. xxii. 36.

† James i. 27.

‡ 1 Tim. i. 5.

§ Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13.

our own hearts, mildness towards others, penitence in the sight of God. To those who are in any degree thus disposed, it not only repeats the obscurer, yet instructive and comfortable, intimations, of pardon, grace, and reward; which the patriarchal ages enjoyed, *as a light shining faintly in a dark place*;* and which after-times lost, and wandered on in the thickest night: but it visits men like *the day-spring from on high*, close followed by the Sun of Righteousness beaming forth to cheer our hearts, and *guide our feet into the way of peace*.† Instead of the shadows and figures of the Mosaic law, which veiled, and, in a great measure, concealed, what they exhibited; it presents us with the undisguised truth and very substance: sets before our eyes that great atonement to the justice of Heaven, which other victims were appointed to presignify; and opens the whole treasure of divine bounty; free forgiveness, kind assistance, eternal happiness, to the worst of sinners, on the equitable, the advantageous terms of ingenuous sorrow, thankful faith, and universal, though still imperfect, obedience. *Come every one that thirsteth, come to the waters of life, and buy without money and without price*.‡ Instead of a heavy yoke of ceremonial restraints, and rigorous observances unexplained, necessary for the immature and injudicious age of the Jewish dispensation; God hath considered Christians as grown up to a manly capacity of rational service, and fuller knowledge of his counsels. He hath therefore communicated to us a much greater number of doctrinal truths, all fitted to instruct our worship, and inflame our gratitude; but hath reduced our ritual performances to two: both of them clear and important in their meaning; easy and affecting in their use, and fully guarded against

* 2 Peter i. 19.

† Luke i. 78, 79.

‡ Isa. lv. i.

being esteemed beyond their use: first, baptism, which most aptly signifies our engagements to preserve ourselves from the defilement of sin, and God's promise to look on us as free from the guilt of it: then the holy Eucharist: which, with equal propriety, expresses our Saviour's giving his body to be broken, and his blood to be shed, for the sake of man; and our being nourished, and strengthened, and united to him for ever, by imbibing and digesting his doctrine, and receiving into our souls, by faith, the beneficial influences of his death.

Thus then the *new Commandment*, delivered by our blessed Lord, is an authentic republication, both of the primitive religion of man before the fall, and of the additional instructions given him after it; with such improvements of these last, as make up, together with the former, a complete institution of piety, fitted to answer all our necessities to the world's end. To prevent or detect any corruptions or mistakes in so important a system of doctrine, the blessed author of it hath provided, that we should have the very words, in which he delivered it, recorded in the Gospels; and his true meaning confirmed, and further explained, in the writings of his immediate disciples: which inestimable treasure Providence hath watched over through every age: and, by its assistance, the *old Commandment* hath once more in these latter days been rescued from dangerous perversions, and happily restored to its original purity.

But besides, he hath made yet another provision for securing, not only the genuine belief, but the faithful practice of it. As man is a social creature, and capable of receiving at least as much benefit from uniting in religion, as in other things: so he hath formed his followers into a spiritual society, or church; to cele-

brate the worship of God more solemnly, and bear a public testimony to his truths ; to **exhort**, and *provoke one another to love and good works ;** to *restore in the spirit of meekness them that are overtaken in faults,†* but *put away from amongst them the grossly and obstinately wicked ;‡* that, if possible, the reverence of so awful a censure may bring them to recollect themselves and repent ; or, supposing it fails, that yet the innocence of the rest, and the honour of the Christian name, may be preserved. And that all this may be performed in a due manner, he hath instituted a regular subordination and succession of *pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*§ An appointment evidently suitable, both to the nature of a being, which so greatly wants instruction and admonition, as man ; and to the nature of a religion, that will so very well bear to be shewn in a full light. However defectively, therefore, or wrongly, this institution may be administered through our faults ; or how much soever it may be despised, or obstructed, through yours ; yet, in itself, it is visibly of excellent use ; and, which is remarkable, peculiar to the religion delivered in Scripture. For, in the Gentile world, through many centuries, we have no one instance of any public teaching, much less any moral discipline, attending their worship. And indeed, when Julian attempted to set up preachers of heathenism, in opposition to those of Christianity, it was immediately foretold him, and the event verified the prediction, that what had proved so effectual to establish truth, would only serve to expose and ruin error.

Such then being the nature of our holy religion, and

* Heb. x. 24, 25.

† Gal. vi. 1.

‡ 1 Cor. v. 13.

§ Eph. iv. 11, 12.

such the methods taken to preserve it from corruption, and make it a perpetual instrument of present and eternal happiness to mankind ; whoever sincerely honours God, loves his fellow-creatures, or wishes well to his own soul, must see and feel himself deeply concerned to embrace and respect the Gospel of Christ ; which God cannot have revealed for such noble purposes, and left any one at liberty to slight a single part of it. But then we must remember, that neither professing nor admiring it, will serve for any thing but our condemnation ; unless we *receive it into an honest and good heart,** and bring forth the fruits of it in pious and virtuous lives. *Little children, let no man deceive you : he that doth righteousness, is righteous : he that committeth sin, is of the devil. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil ;†* and hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his Commandments.‡

* Mark iv. 20.

Luke viii. 15.

† 1 John iii. 7, 8.

‡ 1 John ii. 3.

S E R M O N XXII.

1 PETER iv. 8.

AND ABOVE ALL THINGS HAVE FERVENT CHARITY AMONG YOURSELVES: FOR CHARITY SHALL COVER THE MULTITUDE OF SINS.

A RELIGION, the precepts of which are all just and good, must immediately be acknowledged to be so far true; but if, besides the general temper from which it appoints every particular duty to be done, be the proper and right one, then the argument in its favour strengthens. And if, lastly, the means which it prescribes to form this temper, be well adapted to produce it in the worst of men, and raise it still higher in the best, nothing more can be wanting to prove the practical part of such an institution, which is always the most important part, worthy of him, who alone perfectly knows both the obligations arising from our original nature, and the assistances needful in our present circumstances.

Now this is evidently the case of Christianity. Its injunctions comprehend every dictate, the very purest and sublimest, of natural piety and virtue, without any single article contradictory to them: whereas all religions of human invention have both omitted right things, and commanded wrong ones. The precepts it hath added, peculiar to itself, are few and unexceptionable. And the motives from which the whole is to be practised, are two, the most rational and excellent that

can be conceived : *the first and great commandment, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ; and the second like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself :** both which have one original source ; that inward esteem of moral goodness and rectitude, which must incline us to adore it in our Maker, cultivate it in ourselves, and exercise it towards our fellow-creatures.

This is the genuine spirit of the Gospel : and it is plainly the worthiest and noblest that our nature, or any nature, is capable of : too noble, indeed, for human minds, weak and depraved as they are, to be wholly influenced by at first. And therefore we are trained up to it gradually, by a preparatory discipline of threatenings to restrain, and promises to excite us ; of religious appointments to remind us of our duty, visible signs to make stronger impressions of it, worldly trials of many kinds to exercise and confirm us in it : till, through a course of this improving education, we grow up to our maturity ; and *that which is perfect being come, that which is in part be done away.†* Then God in his own good time shall translate us into a better world, and removing, as superfluous, now, those temporary aids, which, in some degree, obscured the building they contributed to raise, its beauty shall appear complete, and its duration eternal.

Therefore, in every act, and every thought of religion, we should always remember, that the only true measure of our improvement, is the increase of that virtuous affection, which St. Paul hath declared to be *the end of the commandment,‡* love to God, and love to his whole creation ; especially our own species, or as large a proportion of it as our behaviour can affect. The former part of this blessed temper, that which regards our

* Matth. xxii. 37, 38, 39. † 2 Cor. xiii. 10. ‡ 1 Tim. i. 5.

Maker, hath been taught so unintelligibly, and perverted so wildly, by some, and, partly in consequence of that, rejected with such scorn, or admitted with such diffidence, by others ; that to the great disadvantage and dishonour of religion, it hath obtained but little place in the souls of men, even of those, who think themselves pious and devout. And yet, if goodness be the natural object of love, and infinite goodness of the highest love that we can exert, surely the meaning of love to God is as plain, and the obligation to it as indispensable, as the feeling of it is delightful, and the fruits excellent.

Love to our fellow-creatures, the second precept of our blessed Lord, which in the text is rendered *charity*, the original word being the very same, hath indeed so far escaped better than the first, as to be in general terms well spoken of by all the world. But, at the same time, its nature hath often been ill understood ; and its worth seldom considered near enough, yet sometimes exalted a great deal too much.

For these reasons, I shall endeavour,

I. To settle the right notion of this virtue.

II. To shew the just value of it : particularly its influence in what both St. Peter and St. James ascribe to it, *covering of sins*.

I. To settle the right notion of it : a thing the more necessary because the word, by which it is here expressed, hath greatly altered its meaning. Charity, in common speech at present, almost constantly signifies, either judging favourably of the actions and intentions of others, or relieving their distresses : whereas in the New Testament, it never signifies these particularly, and scarce ever any single virtue, but that general benevolence of disposition, which prompts us, on all occasions, to mild thoughts and beneficent deeds ; and on which, wrought in us by the grace of our Redeemer,

depends their true worth and acceptance with God. For this reason, St. Paul very justly supposes a case possible, which else might well seem a very strange one, that of a man's bestowing all he hath to feed the poor, and not having charity; for he may only have vanity or ambition; and as justly determines upon it, that such liberality shall *profit him nothing*.^{*} Charity, therefore, is an inward principle of universal kind affection: and the seeds of it are sown in that constitutional goodness of nature, of which notwithstanding our lamentable degeneracy by the fall, every man hath some remaining degree; the larger the happier, if we manage it with due care. For in this, as in every part of our frame, watchful conduct and judicious culture of our powers and propensities, promoting their growth in some instances, restraining it in others, and directing it in all, is highly necessary to their attaining maturity, and bringing forth valuable fruit. When properly regulated, the most terrible of our passions, anger, becomes the minister of good; and, when left to run wild, the most amiable of our inward feelings, good-nature, is often almost wholly useless, and sometimes the parent of much evil.

Thus, to say nothing of those, whose pretences to it are mere affectation, who extol benevolence to the skies in talk, but give no proof of it in any thing beyond talk: the good-nature of some, who have a sort of it, is intirely notional and romantic. They can be affected most deeply by a moving story; weep over even a feigned distress, when well described, or barely represented to them by fancy; and perhaps weep a second time at reflecting on their own meritorious tenderness: yet, in real cases that come before them, can see the heaviest afflictions without being moved:

^{*} 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

may, can even produce them with a most unrelenting steadiness, when their pleasures, or interests, or favourite schemes, require it. And thus they cultivate, in idea, the most refined and exalted sentiments of humanity, which no one living is ever the better for.

Some again are a little more in earnest than this comes to : but so very little, that, instead of *fervent charity*, it amounts to no more than languid ineffectual goodwill. They wish well, it may be, to all the world : applaud others highly, when they relieve the distressed ; approve it, are sincerely glad of it ; will, on occasion, solicit and press them to it : but if they themselves are called upon to do likewise, know not how to part with any thing worth naming, be they possessed of ever so great superfluity : and have a thousand reasons to alledge, why they cannot, or need not do, what most evidently they both can and ought.

Another sort of persons will give their money freely enough : for they have no regard to money. But if they are wanted to bestow a little pains or contrivance towards extricating any one out of difficulties, that is too hard a task, though it would do ever so much good. To think of the distress of a fellow-creature is grievous to them ; but to set about helping him would be more so : and therefore, instead of condemning and throwing off their indolence, they turn their eyes another way to make themselves easy, and let every thing grow as much worse as it can.

The goodness of a fourth sort is very warm, but extremely short-lived. They will promise wonders and mean all they say ; but forget it in a day's time : and just then would do every thing for a man, whom in their next turn of humour they will do nothing for. So that, till they are known, they mislead and disappoint almost as many, as they undertake to serve.

Another very blameable kind of good-nature is a partial one. That principle must evidently be planted in us for the benefit of all without exception : and yet we most of us, it may be feared, either openly or secretly, except multitudes. The very Gospel of Christ, that was designed to establish universal charity, hath been dreadfully perverted to destroy it : and the doctrine of love abused, to excite in men the bitterest hatred to every persuasion but their own. Nor have they, who profess the greatest abhorrence of such practices, by any means been free from a very ill-natured zeal against religion, while they have censured most vehemently that kind of zeal for it. But in the affairs of civil and common life ; many, that on some occasions have the easiest and mildest tempers, on others, preserve no temper at all. Sometimes the spirit of party takes such possession of very well-meaning men, that they abominate one half of the world round them, it may be for they do not well know what. Sometimes again the most humane creature upon earth to those whom he happens to like, entertains and delights them with the keenest satire and ridicule on such, as he or they happen to dislike, or barely to consider with indifference. The agreeableness of not a few, who have a great deal, is almost intirely lavished on mere common acquaintance : while those nearer friends at home, who are intitled to the largest share of their good-humour and regard, experience continually their peevishness or neglect. And on the contrary, others are so tenderly and immoderately fond of one or more bosom favourites, that they applaud themselves, and, to be sure, are applauded by these at least, as the best and worthiest of mankind : yet will slight most contemptuously all but such dear friends ; and injure most unmercifully every one else, that stands in the way of

them: nay perhaps too, must as constantly have some persons to hate without cause, as others to love without merit. From a foresight of this danger it probably was, that our blessed Saviour, though he had recommended private friendship by his example, enjoined it by no precept; as well knowing, that a proper degree of general good-will would seldom fail to unite men as closely, as was requisite for their own benefit, or consistent with that of others.

But still, an undistinguishing good-nature may be full as bad as a partial one. Too often the inconsiderate, or indolent, give themselves up a prey to whoever lays hold on them. Confident forwardness prevails upon some: a talent for entertaining and diverting them takes with others, abject flattery with a third sort, and little officiousnesses, well-chosen and well-timed, with a fourth. By such as excel in these arts only, they suffer their whole stock of beneficence to be exhausted: and never take the trouble of thinking, how very much better it might be employed: by which means they at once give the worthy the uneasiness of seeing themselves overlooked, and raise the unworthy to a capacity of doing harm.

Nay indeed, when they have done harm, and been guilty of pernicious crimes, there is a false tenderness in many, that makes them unwilling to have past misdemeanors punished, so as may be likely to prevent future ones. They have no compassion for human society, and nothing but compassion for the disturbers of it. To say the truth, some will shew a kind regard to bad characters, which they will shew to none else: and do more to assist the most profligate wretches, under the difficulties and dangers that their profligateness hath brought them into, without either design or desire of reforming them, than they would to supply the most

pitiable necessities of an innocent person or family. Now this preferring such before others, in acts of beneficence, is love of wickedness, not humanity. Or, if there be sometimes a sort of what is called good-nature in it, it is a false sort; and one that approaches very near to being directly vicious: as unquestionably some dispositions are, which in common speech bear this excellent name. Such, for instance, is the yielding flexibleness, that will let men deny nothing to their immoral and imprudent, or perhaps artful companions, whatever pain it gives their worthiest and most respectable friends. Such is the superficial gaiety, that first invites and deceives others into sin; then, without the least concern, abandons them to ruin. Such, lastly, is the thoughtless and profuse generosity, that often usurps the place both of proper charity and even of justice: and, by prompting men to do at some times immoderately great and kind things, without need; reduces them to do, at others, mean and hard, and oppressive things, contrary to the strongest obligations.

These wrong sorts of good-nature (and, melancholy as the number of them is, there are still more) should never tempt us to be unreasonably suspicious of others, though vigilant caution is an essential part of wisdom: but they ought surely to put us on a careful and frequent trial of our own hearts. Is the benevolence of temper and behaviour, for which we value ourselves, and expect the world to value us, of the right stamp? Is no instance of it ostentation, to catch applause; or cunning, to carry points that we have in view? Are we good to those, who differ from us in their way of thinking, whose reputation eclipses, whose competition obstructs us, whose interest with others is superior to ours? Are we ready to befriend unadorned disagree-

able merit ; to bestow private favours on such as can make us no return ; and exercise bountifully, when occasion requires, those kinds of beneficence to which we are otherwise least addicted ? Doth our kindness to particular persons flow from, at least is it consistent with, a sincere concern for the happiness of all mankind ? Are we truly desirous and active to promote their spiritual and eternal, as well as temporal and present, welfare ? And lastly, are the demonstrations that we have given of this excellent temper, proportionable to the degree of it which God conferred on us originally, and the means we have had of improving and exercising it since ? For from those, who have enjoyed a greater share of these, a greater share of usefulness in their respective stations is as much to be expected, as a more plentiful contribution of alms from the rich.

If the foregoing questions can be well answered then our benevolence is a genuine moral virtue. But still there are qualifications of unspeakable moment wanting, to exalt it into that Christian grace, which the Scripture calls charity : that we place at the head of all our motives to it, the love and fear of God, producing a desire to imitate and obey him : that we humbly plead the pardon, obtained by his Son, and promised in his Gospel, for the many imperfections, which a serious review will always discover in our best dispositions and performances : that we earnestly beg the needful aid of his holy Spirit, to carry us, in this and every virtue, beyond the poor insufficient lengths, which fallen and unassisted nature can go. All this God hath enjoined : and those who presumptuously or carelessly neglect it, he will not, he cannot, accept ; how fair an appearance soever they make, in the eyes of others, or their own.

Having thus explained the notion of true Christian charity, or love to mankind, I proceed,

II. To shew the value and advantages of it; first to the world in general, then to the charitable themselves.

The importance of a social spirit to the happiness of society, the necessity of mutual friendliness among creatures so mutually dependent, of compassion in a world so full of misery, of a mild forgiving temper amidst so much frailty, thoughtlessness, and ignorance, need not be proved; and, one should think, cannot easily be overlooked. The heaviest and bitterest part of the sufferings of life will be found, I believe, on inquiry, to flow, from want of good-will, or want of care to shew it: and what felicity then would there rise from mens becoming universally reasonable, humane and courteous; attentive to the interests and inclinations, the hopes and fears, the wants and sorrows, one of another? But, not to amuse ourselves with the vain expectation of every one acting thus, let each person only think, what beneficial effects, to those about him, would follow from his own doing it.

Good-nature, though expressed but in the slightest intercourses of life, gives pleasure and encourages right behaviour sufficiently to make it worthy of being looked on, even in this lowest view, as a duty of great consequence. Whatever hath an immediate and continual influence on the happiness of others, be it in ever so trifling instances, must, on the whole, have a much greater influence than we are apt to imagine. Even the lesser demonstrations, therefore, of obliging condescension in superiors, of respectfulness and deference in inferiors, of desire to please, and willingness to be pleased amongst equals, are matters highly

worth regarding; ways in some or other of which we can every one of us be good to all around us; and it is the only goodness that most of them want from us.

But no one either needs or ought to confine the proofs of his benevolence to such narrow bounds: but, without seeking much for opportunities of exercising it, (an employment, however, the most rational and honourable of all others) will easily find no contemptible ones laid in his way, be his condition in the world almost what it will. Those of distinguished rank, for instance, do the most extensive and important service to their fellow-creatures, while they recommend the practice of religion, of virtue, of prudence, by their example, and enforce it by their authority. Persons engaged in a life of business, have considerable and frequent opportunities of shewing valuable kindness to numbers, at one time or another, in their respective professions, with little or no loss or trouble to themselves. They, whom a better understanding, or longer experience, hath made abler judges of any branch of conduct than others, what opportunities have they of directing the ignorant, warning the thoughtless, and setting the mistaken right, where, perhaps, an error persisted in may be fatal to them for ever? Especially if such as are entitled to give advice, would but study a little, first to make good counsel agreeable, and afterwards, if there be occasion, repentance easy, by receiving offenders back from wrong courses with tenderness, and endeavouring to shelter them from hard censures, on account of the faults they have once forsaken.

But above most others, they, to whom God hath intrusted riches, have obvious and daily opportunities of doing good, by extending bounty to the poor:

under which name though all ought to be included, whose circumstances are too strait for the station in which they are obliged to appear ; yet the lowest part of the world hath undoubtedly, in general, by much the strongest title to the benefit of that denomination. For the distresses of these, when helpless through age or infirmities, or sunk under the burden of a numerous family to feed and cloath, are heavy to a degree, of which they, who see nothing around them but plenty and chearfulness, usually think little. And yet they are bound to think often and seriously, that our Maker's providence hath not permitted so great inequalities of condition in the human species, for one part of them to languish in misery, and the other to look down with contempt upon them. *God accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor : for they are all the work of his hands.** And his gracious intention was, that the virtues of beneficence on one hand and gratitude on the other, should be exercised, and the joy, both of doing and receiving good, be felt amongst men. We are, therefore, none of us, at liberty, either to withhold our due proportion out of covetousness, or to disable ourselves from giving it by expences of other kinds. It is true, indeed, even luxury, by the multitudes it employs, performs in part the work of charity ; for so the wisdom of Heaven hath ordered things, that such as will do no good from right motives, shall do some by their very vices. But then the good done by luxurious expensiveness is very unequally done ; and to such, for the most part, as need and deserve it least : besides that, all the while, it doth infinite harm both to private and public virtue and happiness. Useless professions are increased and enriched, while

* Job xxxiv. 19.

the more necessary ones are left destitute of hands, or impoverished by the exorbitant price of labour: a superfluous number, well able to work, are maintained in idleness, and too commonly in wickedness also; while true objects of compassion are left to the scanty allowance of the law. Besides, other evils, absolutely inseparable from luxury, would greatly over-balance the above-mentioned accidental good consequences arising from it, were they much more considerable than they are. It gives in many respects, a very wrong turn to the minds of the great; and excites a most pernicious emulation of their follies and sins in those below them: tempts both to such behaviour, and entangles both in such difficulties, as have every where proved the final ruin of all virtue and all happiness public and private. But were it to do no harm at all, and ever so much good; yet who, that indulges himself in it, can seriously say he intended that good; intended any thing indeed, but the gratification of his own vanity and voluptuousness? Whereas, enjoying one part of a large income, with decent moderation, and disposing of the other in prudent liberalities, produces good every way; may better, both here and to eternity, the condition of those who partake of such bounty; and must be beneficial in the highest degree to him, who bestows it from a sense of duty: which is the second particular wherein the value of true charity was proposed to be shewn.

The wise author of our beings hath kindly formed us all with a natural tenderness towards each other: which, as it gives us pain on the seeing or hearing of the miseries of our fellow-creatures, unless we wickedly harden ourselves against them; so it rewards us, when we relieve them, with the sweetest joy that we are capable of experiencing: a joy

that neither is succeeded by uneasy reflections, like many others ; nor vanishes quickly into nothing, like most others : but which the heart dwells upon with lasting delight and humble self-approbation. But were this pleasure much less, than whoever habituates himself to it will find it to be, the same goodness of nature, which is the parent of charitable beneficence, is also the best qualification for enjoying the satisfactions and moderating the vexations of social life : and therefore we cannot do a more prudent thing, than to strengthen it by exercise. Besides, good-will to others gives us the surest claim, that any thing can give, to good-will in return ; the proofs of which we may easily come to want on many occasions. But though the world, and even those persons in it whom we have served, recompense us ever so ill, yet not the smallest kind action, that we have either done or designed, shall be lost. For God sees them all ; and will be proportionably gracious, not only to the virtues, but even the failings of those, who have made it their faithful care to shew the mercy which they hope to receive.

And this is that never-failing motive to universal benevolence, which the text urges : *have fervent charity among yourselves : for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.* Not that either the outward acts, or even the inward temper, of this one virtue, though it were extended to all our fellow-creatures, and much less if only to some small part of them, nor that perhaps the most deserving, shall excuse the wilful and unrepented neglect, either of due reverence to God, or moral government of ourselves in other respects. But seldom, indeed, will it happen, if at all, that the profane or debauched, let them be called the best-natured men that ever were, shall do near so much

good as harm in the world, where the whole consequences of their behaviour well computed. But could this be ever so much otherwise, yet to honour and worship our Maker, in the manner which he hath appointed, is one of our essential obligations, and to observe the rules of chastity and temperance, decency and order, is another. Now what we are bound to observe, we cannot possibly be left at liberty to break through or despise. And therefore *be not deceived: God is not mocked.** Whoever lives in the known and indulgent transgression of any duty, or commission of any sin, whatever excellencies in other points he may seemingly or really have, shall not enter into the kingdom of God. Great promises are made to other single virtues, in other passages of Scripture, as well as to charity in this. And the meaning is not, that we may get to heaven by any one good quality that we please: for surely there will no one be found so bad as to have none: but each of them is supposed, though practised more eminently than the rest, to be accompanied by them; not separated from them, and set up against them: a supposition made with still more reason in the present case, than any other of the same kind: because the true love to our neighbour not only comprehends every good disposition towards him, but flows from love to God, and faith in our blessed Redeemer, and dutiful regard to the motions of the Holy Spirit. Indeed all these united, in the poor degree that we possess them, can by no means merit pardon for our failures in all; but only qualify us for obtaining that mercy which St. Peter, in the beginning of this Epistle, ascribes to *the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.†* And nothing less than a prevailing habit of every virtue will complete our

* Gal. vi. 7.

† 1 Peter i. 2.

qualification for final acceptance: but that of each particular one shall contribute towards it, in proportion to its value. And as beneficence, practised in its whole extent on right principles, is of the highest value, the text very properly teaches, and was designed only to teach, that charity, kindness to our fellow-creatures, practised from a principle of conscience, in every way that we have opportunity, shall contribute, in a distinguished manner, to fit us for receiving forgiveness from our Creator, and thus shall *cover the multitude of our sins* at the last day. Since, therefore, being good to our brethren will give us a peculiar claim to the goodness of our heavenly Father: whoever is sensible of his past offences, let him take this way especially of evidencing his repentance; and whoever would entitle himself after death to the noblest of rewards, let him serve God throughout life in this most excellent of all duties.

S E R M O N XXIII.

MATTH. x. 34.

THINK NOT THAT I AM COME TO SEND PEACE ON EARTH;
I CAME NOT TO SEND PEACE, BUT A SWORD.

THAT these words of our blessed Saviour express, not the design of his appearing in the world, but the effect it would have very contrary to his design, through the wickedness of men, both his life and doctrine sufficiently shew; and, indeed, all sorts of men have acknowledged. For though too many Christians have acted as if they understood him to desire what he only foretels, and thought it their duty to make his words good: yet none of them, I think, have ever professed to understand him so. And infidels themselves have done him the justice of allowing, that he meant to establish good-will and virtue among men. But then his religion, they say, hath so miserably failed of answering his purpose, hath produced such dreadful evils, and been of so exceeding small benefit, that they cannot imagine a wise and good being, as God is, would ever take such very extraordinary methods as the Gospel asserts, to introduce and establish it. And though few, it may be hoped, will think it reasonable to carry the matter thus far; yet many may be tempted by such confident affirmations, if not to doubt of the truth of Christianity, yet to have less delight in it, less thankfulness and zeal for it, than they would otherwise have.

We shall do well, therefore, to inquire, both how far the facts alledged in this objection are true, and whether the conclusion drawn from them is just.

That considerable evils have taken their rise from our Saviour's doctrine, must be owned. He himself, we see, declares they would: and he had reasons to declare it in terms as strong, as the truth would warrant. For as the Jews expected nothing but peace and prosperity, for themselves at least, under their Messiah, it was both honourable and prudent to give them fair warning of what was to happen, that they might not first be elevated with false hopes and heated into presumptuous behaviour, and then complain they had been deceived and misled. Besides, as he undoubtedly thought the least degree of evil a great deal too much, he could not speak slightly of that which he foresaw. But still he could never design to say, that it would over-balance or go near to equal the good: for thus he might have discredited his own mission, and contradicted the whole tenour of his own discourses.

The allegations, therefore, of the argument before us cannot be proved from this text, nor, indeed, from any other. But the whole proof must be drawn from the natural tendency of Christianity, and the experience of its effects. Now it cannot, consistently with common modesty, be denied, that the tendency of Christianity to the welfare of mankind is very powerful. Justice and mercy, obedience to superiors, condescension to inferiors, mutual tenderness and mutual usefulness, are the main precepts that every where occur in it: to these peculiarly the reward of everlasting happiness is annexed; and nothing contrary to them is ever taught throughout the Scripture. It is very true, pleas have been made from it in support of

tyranny and cruelty ; but they are so absolutely groundless, that unbelievers themselves have vindicated our religion in this respect, by charging it on those whom they apprehended to claim exorbitant powers, that they assumed what their own sacred books did not give them the least colour for.

Nor indeed do I remember any accusation against the Gospel, as hurtful in its nature, at all worth notice, excepting that of the great stress it is said to lay on right belief: from whence, we are told, all who imagine each other to believe amiss have been prompted to reciprocal hatred and persecution ; whereas, the Heathens had no articles of faith, and therefore lived in peace.* But indeed every profession, both of religion and irreligion, must have some belief to ground itself upon : else it will be a profession of nothing. Deists, and even Atheists, have their Creed : consisting, as they would find upon inquiry, of much stranger doctrines than ours doth ; which also they believe to be of vast importance, otherwise they would be self-condemned for propagating it. Nay, if we may judge of what many of them would do, by the spirit they manifest in what they say : as they inveigh against Christianity now both with bitterness and unfairness, they would employ against it, if they had power, violence as well as fraud.† Then, as for the Heathens, whose mildness in these matters is so extolled ; both Jews and Christians had most dreadful experience of their want of it. Nor were they by any means totally guiltless of religious quarrels among themselves. Nor hath the Gospel given the least encouragement to such quarrels by the faith it requires. So much faith it must require, as may be a foundation for the duties it

* See Letter to the Minister of Moffat, p. 7. and the answer to it.

† See Leland against Tindal, Vol. I. p. 302—312.

enjoins. But all unnecessary speculations it condemns in the fullest and strongest terms. Be mens faith ever so right, it tells them plainly they shall never be rewarded, without every part of a good life: and be their faith ever so wrong, it neither permits unkind usage of them in this world, nor harsh judgment with respect to another. There are, indeed, awful denunciations in the Bible, against such as corrupt the Gospel, *turn the grace of God into lasciviousness*,* or abuse it to patronise any kind of immorality. But nothing severe is ever said of well-meaning persons that mistake: nor any thing more severe of bad men that err in opinion, than of bad men that do not. Nor can there be stricter injunctions against any thing, or enforced with better arguments, than those of Christ and his Apostles against all sorts of persecution. So that had they established ever so many articles of faith, and laid ever so much weight upon them, yet as they have certainly laid equal weight at least on brotherly love, mutual forbearance, and universal charity: they can never have authorised doing any harm in the world. And the religion they taught is confessedly fitted to do all the good in it, which the purest precepts, and the strongest inducements to practise them, the most regular care to instruct men, and the most friendly discipline to watch over them, are capable of.

Yet some, notwithstanding, will insist, that in fact it hath done harm: and against fact there is no arguing. But, in the nature of things, nothing can do what it hath no manner of tendency to do. Christianity therefore may have been the pretence, may have been the occasion, of evil; but the cause it cannot. However, let us inquire, what the proof is of its having any way occasioned near so much harm, as it hath directly pro-

* Jude 4.

duced good. We readily confess, a long catalogue may with ease be given of the sins and sufferings that have followed its appearance and establishment. In the first place its professors underwent grievous persecutions from the rest of mankind. But evidently this is no more to be charged upon Christianity, than the injuries which the wicked have often done to the good, on account of their goodness, are to be charged on moral virtue. In the next place, the Jews, having offended God by their inhuman treatment of the Gospel, were permitted by his just providence, to turn the same bitter spirit against each other, and against the Romans, and so to bring on themselves utter destruction. But here also Christianity is perfectly clear, unless it be an innocent man's fault, that a criminal is punished for having robbed or murdered him. And these things it probably was that our Saviour had chiefly in view, when he spoke in the text of *a sword to be sent on the earth*; or, as, perhaps, it should be translated, *on the land*, the country of Judæa.

But, we must acknowledge farther, discord and divisions prevailed very soon among Christians also, and produced lamentable effects: till they came at length to exercise barbarities one towards another, equal to any they had suffered from infidels. But then it ought to be allowed us in return, that though unjust spiritual censures began even in the second century, and the lower degrees of temporal persecution, such as banishment and confiscation, in the fourth, very soon after they had power: yet the utmost extremities were introduced much later, nor did they receive the formal sanction of the supreme authority, till many ages after. I believe twelve hundred years had passed, before any

law was made in any Christian state for putting men to death on account of erroneous faith. Since that time, indeed, most shocking tragedies have been acted by a wicked zeal for religion. But then many, that have seemed to proceed from that cause, were but the real truth known, would in all likelihood be found, and indeed often have been found, to proceed from quite other motives. Interests and resentments have been covered perpetually with a mask of piety. Zealots have often been only the instruments of parties, while they seemed to be their directors: and the mischief, done in the name of God, would have been as certainly done without it under some other pretence, if that had not offered itself. Religion is a specious plea: and therefore was used whenever it could: but any plea will serve for what men are bent to do. And if the mischiefs that have been disguised under a form of godliness, could not in some cases have been so easily or so effectually accomplished else: yet the whole of them ought not to be attributed even to the pretence of piety: but only so much as would not have happened, had not that been used. Religious animosities, religious wars, have been frequent and dreadful. But can we imagine, that if these had been avoided, no others would have arisen, during all the time that they have filled? Such a notion would argue strange ignorance of human nature. So that in ages when the world hath appeared to suffer very much from the abuses of religion, it may indeed have suffered, very little from them. And of what it hath suffered, one great part may have proceeded, not from the bigotry of believers, but the artifices of such as were inwardly unbelievers.

But besides the evil of discord, Christianity hath

been accused of obstructing knowledge, and promoting ignorance in the world.* But in what condition was the world before Christianity? Did not the grossest ignorance, about matters of the highest importance to men, prevail almost every where, even in the politest and best instructed nations? And if the succeeding times were not learned, what else could be expected; when the Roman Empire, debased and sunk under tyranny and luxury before it received the Gospel, was soon after dissolved by that inundation of barbarians that overspread Europe with war and desolation? By these Heathens it was that arts and sciences were brought so low. What remained of learning, remained among Christians: and as they became Christians, they shared in it. Little was left indeed. But had it not been for the professors, and particularly the teachers of this religion, to which some would impute all the darkness of the middle ages, every monument of ancient days must probably have been lost.† Christians they were too, and principally clergymen, that have restored and improved learning since; and the Christian world is at this day the seat of it. Nor will the unbelievers amongst us, I am persuaded, pretend, that what they have contributed to make it so, is at all material in comparison, or presume to mention the names of their few and arrogant leaders in competition with the multitudes of truly great men, who have adorned the faith of Christ by their distinguished excellence in every branch of philosophy and literature. Indeed learning is of such eminent service, both to the understanding and the proof of our religion, that we must of necessity sup-

* That Christianity hath not been hurt by the increase of knowledge, see Warburton, Vol. II. Serm. xv.

† The religious Orders established in the 11th century, revived learning in the 12th. See *Journ. des Sc.* July, 1744. p. 317.

port it. And accordingly, more are bred up to learning with a view of being dedicated to the ministry of the Gospel, than with any other whatever. Few of them, in proportion, we own, make great improvements : but few in any profession do. And preserving thus, though it be but a moderate degree of knowledge amongst men, cannot fail to be exceedingly useful ; especially of that knowledge which immediately relates to their moral conduct. But were infidelity once to prevail, the chief inducements to all applications of this sort would cease : scarce any one would take the pains to learn, what it would be no one's particular duty to teach ; worldly pursuits and sensual indulgences, having little to check them, would almost wholly ingross the attention of mankind ; and produce not only a neglect, but a contempt, of more liberal studies ; as I fear we have begun to experience already.

But we shall be told, that how little harm, or how much service soever, Christianity may have done to learning ; it hath contributed nothing to the virtue or happiness of mankind, and therefore cannot be a religion worthy of God. Now on the contrary we apprehend, it hath contributed to both these very greatly : and it seems the extremity of unreasonableness to say, that, in spite of all its precepts, promises and threatenings, it can make multitudes bad, and yet by the force of them all can make no one good. There is visibly no possibility that either better rules of life should be given, or more interesting motives to observe them, than the Gospel hath given. It must therefore reform those, whom any doctrine can : and the only objection against it on this head must be, that it doth not reform those whom no doctrine can.

Still it will be said ; look into the history of Christian nations, into that of the Christian clergy in

particular; and what will you find, but the same wrong inclinations and wrong behaviour, in at least the same degree as amongst other men? And it must be owned, the professors of the Gospel in general, but the ministers of it above all, (because, though on the whole we have by no means been worse, yet we ought to have been far better than the rest) have much cause to be humble before God and the world for the dishonour we have done by our negligence, our sensuality, our haughtiness, our ambition, our covetousness, our unfairness, our bitterness, to the worthy and holy name whereby we are called. But as to the degree of these faults, it should be observed, that if sins and follies make the chief figure in Christian histories, so they do and must in all histories. Virtuous and quiet times, be they ever so long, virtuous and quiet men, be they ever so many, furnish usually but slender materials for a narration, and fill up but a small space in it;* whereas great notice is taken of the bad things that are done in the world, partly from a natural dislike of wickedness, partly from personal hatred to some of those who commit it, and partly also from the pleasure men have in framing comparisons advantageous to themselves. But especially the failings of such as lie under peculiar obligations of being pious and exemplary, will always be seen in the very strongest light, and blame thrown upon them beyond all proportion, when they act amiss. But when men act well, and things go on right, very little is said. The good do not proclaim their own goodness: and the world is seldom very inquisitive about it; hath other matters to mind; thinks at the most they do but their

* Εις τῆς γὰρ ἡσυχίας, ὑποθέσιν οἱ ἱστοριογράφοι ἐθέλοντες ἕχ' ἐξῆσιν. ἐπεὶ καὶ ἡμεῖς—ἔκ αν ηυπορησάμεν ἡποθεσεως, καὶ οἱ φιλῶντες τὰς ἡσυχίας ἡσυχάζειν προσηνῶ. Socr. Hist. Eccl. in fine.

duty, and is much apter to seek for, and imagine faults, than to own and remember virtues.

In the primitive times, when few were tempted to profess the faith of Christ but such as embraced it in earnest, and his disciples were easily distinguished from the rest of mankind, the fruits of the Gospel bore a most convincing testimony in its favour. But when once the profession grew general, and profitable: when real and pretended Christians were mixed together, and the virtuous hid amongst the immoral, no wonder if then the benefit was less remarkable. The whole promiscuous collection going all under one name, and many of them seeming but little the better for their faith, both partial and careless observers have hastily concluded that few or none are the better at all. And yet, there are great numbers on the whole, much greater than either the profane are ready to think, or even the pious have commonly the means of knowing, whose hearts and lives their belief hath wonderfully amended: some of good dispositions raised by it to eminent goodness: others of bad dispositions excited to resist them effectually. And how much the influence of religious principles and religious persons, whom our Saviour calls the *salt of the earth*,* may contribute to preserve even the bad part of mankind from utter corruption and dissolution, is not perhaps often sufficiently considered.

But were it true, though it neither is nor can be, that the virtuous would be equally virtuous without the precepts, without the promises, without the grace of the Gospel: yet there is no pretence, that they would be equally happy too. For the Christian doctrine is adapted throughout in the highest degree to support them under the difficulties of duty, and the afflictions

* Matth. v. 13.

of life, by such assurances, as reason unassisted can never give, that God will pardon, strengthen, and reward them, both here and to eternity. Possibly to some this may seem at present a small matter. But there will come a time, may it come before it be too late! when they will be sensible, that these are the most important of all things.

It must not be objected, that believers in the Gospel are often full of doubts and terrors. For believers in natural religion alone, have infinitely more cause for them, as both their rule and their hopes are infinitely more obscure. Nor must it be argued, that if Christianity adds to the happiness of the virtuous here, it adds also to the uneasiness of the vicious: for they ought to be uneasy for the world's sake and their own. It may force them to grow better; if not, it may restrain them from growing worse: at least, sooner or later, it may bring them back, in part if not wholly; and thus prevent an unknown quantity of evils, which else they would suffer, and make those around them suffer. So that, indeed, no one person, where the Gospel is at all understood, can well fail to be in some respects a gainer by it. And be its good influence ever so small on each singly, yet the sum total must be very large. It is soon said in an angry mood, that religion doth no good; for the world cannot be worse than it is. But consider a little what the face of things would be, were the forming hand of Christian education to cease from its work, and the continual warnings of Christian instruction to be laid aside. Nothing could be substituted comparable to them: nothing would be substituted at all. Attempts for it, if they were made, which probably they might not be in haste, would be disunited and inconsistent, disregarded and unsuccessful: all persons would be left in a

great measure, and the lower and larger part entirely, to the guidance of appetites and passions grown up wild, with a very poor mixture of a reason uninformed and more likely to be subservient and do mischief, than govern and do good.

Nor have they alone, who profess Christianity, been made wiser and better by it, but others also. The chief part of what is valuable in the Mahometan religion, which hath spread exceedingly wide, is probably derived from the Old and New Testament. And certainly the unbelievers amongst ourselves, who would fain represent revelation as useless, have, notwithstanding, borrowed from it those rational notions of piety and virtue, which they pretend to be the natural growth of their own understandings. For few or none of the most learned of their Heathen predecessors had them : but scarce the most ignorant of their Christian contemporaries are without them.

Nor should we consider only what good the Gospel hath done in other respects, but how much superstition particularly it hath extinguished or prevented. The superstitions it hath occasioned, we are continually told of : but many seem to have forgot those it found in the world ; the most absurd and abject, the most expensive and troublesome, the most immoral and barbarous, that could be. And none were more cruel, or upheld by a more dreadful church-tyranny, than those of the Druids in this nation. Now who can say, how long any of these might have continued ; who can say, how much worse they might have become, and have been at this day, if Christianity had not rooted them out ? The very grossest corruptions of it, afterwards, were not quite so bad as those preceding enormities. Besides, in many countries, but in none more completely than our own, the reformation of it hath driven out

those abuses, which the perversion of it brought in: and it continually bears testimony against them, wherever the Scripture is freely read. Superstition is by no means an effect of religion, but a natural weakness in the human mind, to which it may be greatly subject even without religion. The Gospel was intended to destroy it: the clergy are intended for a standing guard against it: and though too much of it still prevails among Christians, yet very much more prevails in all the rest of the world.

Taking therefore into our view the whole benefit of the Scripture-revelation, both what it hath effected, and what it hath hindered: had it been the pretence or the occasion for all the harm that is alledged, it may yet have been the direct cause of unspeakably more good; and nothing can be unfairer, than attending only to one side of the account, instead of both. Indeed to state both exactly, or make any balance approaching towards accuracy, is utterly impossible, where so vast a number of things and circumstances, through so large a part of the world and so long a succession of ages, must come in before a judgment can be formed. Every one may assert as boldly as he will to the disadvantage of Christianity. But to prove the assertion from fact must be insuperably difficult. And when facts cannot be sufficiently ascertained and compared, the presumption will always be a very just and strong one, that every thing hath produced those effects chiefly, which its natural tendency fits it to produce. Now the good tendency of Christianity no candid and considerate reasoner will ever dispute.

But one objection farther hath been raised, that how difficult soever it may be to judge of a series of past times, yet the consequences of introducing the Gospel

into Heathen nations in our own times may be judged of: and we have imparted it to none, but we have made them worse than we found them. Now supposing this dreadful imputation true, is it by teaching them our religion, that we have corrupted them, or by teaching them sins absolutely inconsistent with our religion? Had they learned our Christianity without our debauchery, which is surely no part of it, their condition had been infinitely better than it was before: and had they learned our debauchery without our Christianity, it had been still worse than it is now.

Nor doth this observation hold with respect to them only, but ourselves too. We compare the present Christian times, in which numberless incentives to luxury and all manner of wickedness abound, with the ancient Heathen ones, when the poverty and simplicity of their manner of life secured them from adding artificial, to their natural, vices: and in whatever we find or imagine ourselves worse than them, we ascribe it to our religion. Whereas the true method of comparing is, to take a luxurious Heathen nation; Rome under its emperors for instance; and a luxurious Christian one; and then see where crimes will appear to be most general, and carried farthest: only making due allowance for one thing, that the sins and follies we are offended at in our own age, will look greater, because they are present; and yet the virtues of those we live amongst will seem less, because love to ourselves will tempt us to depreciate those, with whom we shall be most compared.

But supposing it ever so questionable, what good or ever so clear what harm, hath proceeded from Christianity; how are we justified in doubting on that account, whether its origin be from God? Think only of how little benefit reason hath been to a great part of

mankind : how much uneasiness it hath caused, by enabling them to reflect on their own disadvantages, dangers, and sufferings ; how much mischief it hath brought to pass, by qualifying them to contrive and execute ill designs against each other ; how much wiser and better many brutes are, than many men : yet doth not reason proceed from God ? Again, what innumerable evils in all ages and countries, have civil governors been the authors of ? The abuses of Christianity cannot have produced so much evil, as the abuses of temporal power, because they have not extended near so far. Yet is not society and civil government from God ? Indeed if nothing could be from him, but what in the event is an advantage to us ; we must deny that the very being of many persons is derived from him : for too many doubtless had better never have been. The good, which he intends absolutely and unconditionally, nothing can hinder : but where he intends only to afford men the means of being happy if they will, he must leave it in their choice to be otherwise : and what he doth for them, is not the less worthy of him, because they are so unworthy, as to despise or turn it against themselves. For never sure was it made an argument against the value of a medicine, that they who neglect to take it, or who mix poison with it, are not the better for it. Whoever will give religion leave to do him good, will always be an evidence of its usefulness. And it is extremely hard, to have those alledge against us that there are but few such, who are continually endeavouring that there may be none ; and impute that wickedness of the world to the want of efficacy in Christianity, which is so very much owing to their own profane discourse and licentious examples.

But farther : the Gospel-scheme is not completed

yet ; and the good it hath not done, it may do still. It hath subsisted indeed a number of years, that seems a large one, and sufficient to shew whatever is to be expected from it. But large and small are comparative terms : and what proportion its duration hitherto may bear to that which it hath to come, or how differently the power of God may be exerted in its favour hereafter from what it is now, we none of us know. But this we know certainly, that the original books in which it is contained, published at its first appearance, foretold both its past and present corruptions, and its future purity and universal happy fruits. The former of these predictions, that Christianity should be made an instrument of tyranny and superstition, bloodshed and dissoluteness, was a very amazing one : a thing which neither any sagacity could have foreseen, nor any enthusiast have believed ; nor any impostor would have declared, if he had believed it. And therefore the fact, joined with the prophecy of it, far from an objection, is a proof of our religion ; and shews us to be in the midst of an event ; the melancholy part of which having been so remarkably signified to us before-hand, we ought by no means to judge of what will follow as we should in a common case ; but firmly believe, that as *the mystery of iniquity** hath been revealed, *the mystery of God*† shall be accomplished likewise, and truth and virtue reign on this earth.

But then let us remember, that full enough hath been done to verify the first set of predictions ; and it is high time we should begin to make good the latter. That Christ hath *sent a sword on earth*, no one doubts : let it now be our care to shew him in a more amiable light, as the *Prince of Peace*. We have sufficiently made the *Gospel minister to sin* : let us at last

* 2 Thess. ii. 7.

† Rev. x. 7.

bring forth *fruit by it unto holiness*. Then we shall bear in our own breasts the surest, the happiest, the only beneficial proof of its efficacy; and *have our conversation* such amongst unbelievers, that *whereas they now speak against us as evil-doers*, and against our religion itself for our sakes, *they may by our good works, which they shall behold, glorify God* :* thus bringing forward that blessed time, when *the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid*: when they shall not hurt nor destroy in all his holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.†

Yet even this joyful scene will be only a faint shadow of that eternal state of bliss, to which is reserved the complete vindication of the benefits of Christianity: and in which, however the present world were to go on, they must appear with irresistible evidence, when *the righteous shall shine forth as the Sun in the kingdom of their Father*,‡ when God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.§

* 1 Pet. ii. 12.

† Isaiah xi. 6, 9.

‡ Matth. xiii. 43.

§ Rev. xxi. 4.

S E R M O N XXIV.

ISAIAH, i. 16, 17.

—CEASE TO DO EVIL, LEARN TO DO WELL—

THE order, in which these words are placed, was evidently designed to teach us, that the foundation of acting right is avoiding every thing wrong. Several other parts of Scripture lay down the same rule in almost the same terms :* and many express, or imply, the same doctrine ; putting repentance before faith and obedience.† Even Heathen authors, in very distant ages and countries, have given the like direction.‡ And indeed every one must own the justness of it : but still very few appear to perceive or attend sufficiently to its importance : which, therefore I shall endeavour to shew you,

I. More briefly, in respect of our conduct in general :

II. More at large, in respect of our behaviour to each other.

I. In respect of our conduct in general.

* Psal. xxxiv. 14. xxxvii. 27. Amos v. 15. Rom. xii. 9. 1 Pet. iii. 11.

† Matth. xxi. 32. Mark i. 15. Acts xx. 21. Tit. ii. 12, 13.

‡ Θεραπευει και πολιζει [ή παιδεια] τη καθαρίκη δυναμει· ειθ' όταν καθαρωσιν, ὅπως αὐτὸς εἰσαγείῃ πρὸς τὰς ἀρετάς, κ. τ. λ. Ceb. Tab. p. 35. Ed. Salm. Sapientia prima est Stultitia caruisse. Hor. Epist. i. 1. Τῆς ἀρχομένης ἀπὸ μοχθηρίας ἀγωγῆς ἐπὶ καλλίονα μελαβαινειν χρεὶ πρῶτον ἐξεμειντον τῆς κακοζωίας ἰον, καὶ τότε τοῖς τῆς εὐζωίας ἀγαθοῖς τρέφεσθαι.—Η γὰρ πρῶτοπαρχουσα μοχθηρία τὰ προσιόντα χρεῖα διαφθεῖρει.—ὥς ἡ τάξις ἀπαίλει τῆς εὐαγωγίας καὶ ἀδοχὴν. Simpl. in Epict. c. 6.

It is plainly the natural and rational method, to begin with removing what else will obstruct our progress, and to make unity within our own breasts our earnest care. He who hath only consistent pursuits may follow them with a prospect of success: but a mind, divided and distracted between contrary principles of action, can hope for nothing, but to be drawn backward and forward by them continually, as they chance to prevail in their turns. Things, indeed, that do but accidentally give some little hindrance to each other now and then, may be prosecuted together, and the due preference, when they interfere, be adjusted well enough. But sin and duty are so essentially opposite, that their interests can never be reconciled. They flow from different motives, proceed by different means, aim at different ends, and thwart one another perpetually. And it is to men's overlooking this obvious truth, that the miscarriage of their good intentions, the irresolution of their lives, the incoherence of their characters, in a great measure, owes its rise. Every one of us knows, in the main, what he ought to do: every one feels an approbation of it; and so far, at least, a disposition to it. But then he feels also dispositions quite adverse: and though he sees them to be unwarrantable, yet it is painful to root them out, and not pleasing even to take notice of them. So, to avoid trouble, both sorts are allowed to grow up together as they can; and which will thrive faster, soon appears. The soil, corrupt nature, is by far the most inclined to weeds: they sprout up without number and choak the good seed. Perhaps but one or two sorts of wickedness were intended to be indulged: but these have unforeseen connections with others, and those with more. Or, had they none, when men have once yielded to do but a single thing amiss, they have no firm ground to

stand upon in refusing to do a second, and a third : so gradually they lose their strength, God withdraws his help, and they fall from bad to worse. Often this ends in their present worldly ruin. But if they escape it, nay, if they escape growing continually more wicked, still they are incapable of that delightful consciousness which arises from uniform integrity of heart ; they can have no true peace, while vices are struggling in their breast with one another, as well as with virtue ; they condemn, they lament themselves : they make earnest resolutions to reform in this and that point ; but making none to reform in all, they relapse, and go on as they did before. Many of them try hard, and no wonder, to get opinions that will quiet them in their practices : amongst which one of the most prevalent is, the notion of compensating by good deeds for evil. But how can our best actions possibly make amends for our sins, when they are only *our duty*,* though we had never sinned ? Or if any one doth bring himself to believe this ; in proportion as he becomes more easy, he will become more profligate. He will think himself at liberty to commit any crime he pleases, provided he doth but intend to give God such or such satisfaction for it, which, perhaps, he will afterwards forget, or invent some pretence to omit. But if he doth not ; as they that run these lengths quickly come to value their good deeds at as high, and their ill at as low, a rate, as they have a mind ; they commonly reckon a very little of the former equivalent to a great deal of the latter. And if they are but noted for any single instance of obedience, it gives them vanity enough to esteem themselves not only safe, but highly in the divine favour, let them disobey in ever so many : perhaps it dazzles and blinds them so, that they scarcely perceive

* Luke xvii. 10.

their own failures in any, or scarcely imagine them worth regarding. Nay, sometimes acts of mere superstition and folly, indeed of wickedness too under a thin disguise of religion, have been all the atonement offered to Heaven for an ill-spent life, and have been deemed a most meritorious one. But will God accept even a real part of what we owe him, when paid with design to cheat him of the rest? His nature, his word, plainly tell us the contrary. He is holy, and requires universal holiness. He hath warned us, that *no man can serve two masters* :* and that *whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* † Such, therefore, only, as are careful to do every thing which they ought, and are sensible, that when they have done all, they *are unprofitable servants*, ‡ intitled to acceptance only for the sake of a gracious Redeemer's merits, have cause to hope well. Others *build on the sand*, but they *on a rock*. § Their superstructure will stand firm against storms and may be safely raised to the greatest heights. God will pardon their infirmities, and assist their endeavours: they will of course be making a continual progress, and for every step of it will receive a proportionable reward, probably here, certainly hereafter. In short, let men devise what methods they will, there is but one effectual: *keep innocency and take heed unto the thing that is right: for that shall bring a man peace at the last.* ||

But though avoiding to do evil through the whole of our conduct is requisite, if ever we would do well: yet in the text, by what precedes and follows, the Prophet seems to have intended it peculiarly as a direction for our social conduct: where, indeed, we shall find it peculiarly necessary, when we consider,

* Matth. vi. 24. † James ii. 10. ‡ Luke xvii. 10.
§ Matth. vii. 24—27. || Psal. xxxvii. 38.

II. The importance of behaving inoffensively to each other.

It is a remarkable thing in the constitution of this world, that we have much more power of producing misery in it than happiness. Every one, down to the most insignificant, is capable of giving uneasiness and disquiet, nay, grievous pain and affliction to others, and often to great numbers, without the least difficulty ; while even those of superior abilities in every way, can hardly discover the means, unless it be within a very narrow compass now and then, of doing any great good, or communicating any considerable pleasure. Besides, the effects of kindnesses may always be intirely lost : but those of injuries too frequently can never be remedied. And therefore we ought to watch over ourselves with perpetual care, examine the tendency of all our words and actions, and, not contented with meaning no harm, be solicitous to do none. The harm that we do through heedlessness is certainly not so criminal, as if it were purposely contrived : but may be almost, if not quite, as severely felt notwithstanding : or though it were but slightly, why should we be so inadvertent, as unnecessarily to cause but an hour's, nay, a moment's, vexation or grief to one of our brethren ; or deprive him of the smallest of those innocent gratifications, that help to alleviate the sorrows of life, and make the passage through it comfortable ? The little we enjoy of good, is, with reason, very precious to us : and we have a right to expect, that others should take the trouble of some moderate caution not to trample upon and destroy it. Human happiness is a tender plant, which every rude breath is sufficient to blast : and all have so quick a sense, and most men so warm a resentment of any thing done, though innocently, against their interests or incli-

nations, that they ought by no means to be indifferent about those of any one else. Yet how often are not only smaller inconveniences, but heavy sufferings, brought from very trifling or very bad motives, on such as did not deserve them ! Some under colour of the tenderest affection, seduce inconsiderate creatures, who, but for them, would never have thought of doing amiss, into guilt and wretchedness, merely to gratify a brutal appetite, or gain empty applause from fellow-libertines. Others tempt their acquaintance, by fallacious arguments and bad examples, to imprudence, extravagance, intemperance, impiety. A third sort entertain themselves, and their ill-chosen friends, by exposing to scorn or disquieting with vexation, just whomsoever their fancy points out to them : often the very persons whom they ought to respect the most. And the authors of all these distresses can raise themselves diversion even from reflecting upon them afterwards ; and, by doing mischief with so much good-humour, appear in the eyes of the world, and in their own, to be very far from ill-natured. And, it may be, on some occasions they are not such : it may be, they have not, on any, deliberately purposed to be such. But still the fruits of indulging either sensual desires, or even vanity and idle gaiety, without regard to consequences, may be as bitter as those of the keenest malice. Nay, indeed the disguised smiling enemy is the more dangerous, as he is unsuspected ; and the more wicked, as he is unprovoked.

But men of more stayed and thoughtful characters venture also too commonly on dreadful ill-treatment of others, and yet make a shift to think well of themselves : not only *withhold good from him to whom it is due, when it is in the power of their hand to do it,** but

* Prov. iii. 27.

prey upon their neighbours by oppression and fraud, *grind the face of the poor,** take advantage of the necessity or ignorance of those with whom they are concerned; exact, without regard to equity, whatever they can legally demand; and imagine it very easy to procure a dispensation for all this, if they need any. Some have attempted it by voluntary mortifications and abstinence. But *the fast which God hath chosen, is to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free.†* Some by acts of devotion: but *he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.‡* Some by liberalities to pious or charitable uses: but God himself hath told us: *I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt-offering.§* He expects restitution to the injured, not bounty to other purposes, instead of it: much less indiscreet generosities to the undeserving, or expensive acts of vanity and voluptuousness, under pretence of encouraging trade and labour; which many seem to think an abundant counterbalance to ever so much deceit and rapine, as well as debauchery and irreligion.

There is yet a third sort, who, valuing themselves highly on their sobriety and honesty, conceive their disrespect to superiors, their contempt of inferiors, their want of courtesy to equals, their causeless or immediate anger, their evil-speaking and uncharitableness, to be small sins, or none. Yet surely, if any thing be our own, the enjoyment of our lives and characters in peace and quiet, unmolested by rude insults, malicious or peevish resentments, unjust aspersions, is our most valuable property, and taking it away from us, one of the worst kinds of cruelty.

* Isaiah iii. 15.

† Ibid. lviii. 6.

‡ Prov. xxviii. 8.

§ Isaiah lxi. 8.

Were it ever so possible to do equal good, in return for the harm done in one or other of these ways: what right hath any one to play thus with the most serious interests of his fellow-creatures; to commit injuries first, then make amends for them, when and how he thinks fit? If it be to a different person the sufferer is not in the least the better for that. If it be to the same, still what amends can there be made for seducing, impoverishing, blackening, breaking the spirits of, another? Happiness in this world is not felt like misery: and one poor creature, treated in any respect unmercifully, may soon undergo much more, than numbers, kindly used, or plentifully provided for, will ever enjoy.

Surely then to refrain from doing harm is a very important duty: and no request can be juster for one of us to make to another, than that if we may not hope for any of those acts of positive goodness from him, which yet human nature and circumstances frequently call for, he would, however, abstain from hurting us; and allow us the undisturbed possession of whatever we have cause to think valuable, and he hath nothing to do with. In other things commanded, there may be frequently some room for a plea of ignorance or doubt: in this hardly ever. The weakest and dullest of us can easily perceive, when we suffer injuries: now it is not a whit more difficult, only we have less inclination, to observe when we are guilty of them: and therefore we have no excuse for it. When men are exhorted to deeds of charity and beneficence, they can find a thousand reasons against complying: their ability is small, or the calls upon them are many; or they cannot see, that they are bound to give more alms than they do already; or they have not time or convenience for inquiring into cases; or, if one be recommended to

them, it may be partially represented ; or the care of it belongs rather to such and such, than to them : and numberless evasions besides, by which an unwilling heart betrays, while it studies to conceal, itself. But were they to be allowed every allegation, that scrupulousness of being too good can suggest to them : at least their wariness and caution should incline them to be equally scrupulous on the other side. To do no wrong, they certainly have in their power ; and they owe it to every one ; and the limits of this obligation have no such great obscurity, but that all the world will see, whether they exceed them or not. If, therefore, they will shew a right disposition in, what is undoubtedly in their power, being conscientiously inoffensive ; then it may be credible, but not else, that they would shew it in more things, were they able.

And, strange as it may appear to speak of what seems a mere negative quality, as a real good : yet scarce any words are strong enough to express, how much good bare cessation from doing evil would produce. Consider only, how the world groans under the various sufferings, which we bring upon each other : so various, that it is in vain to think of representing to one's self, in how many ways the lives, healths, fortunes, reputation, peace, comfort of men are fatally attacked : what blows are sometimes given to the happiness of multitudes at once : how far more private injuries frequently extend their consequences ; involving undesigning and unknown persons in calamities ; affecting successive generations ; teaching and encouraging wickedness by ill example ; provoking retaliation and revenge ; perpetuating contention, bitterness, and rancour. In short, the state of man upon earth would be quite another thing than it is ; and the whole of human affairs put on a face intirely new ; if we

would be content to permit it ; if, without contributing to our mutual happiness, we would only not obstruct it. Sudden deliverance from any acute pain hath been thought, by those who have experienced it, the most exquisite pleasure they ever felt. How inexpressibly delightful then would the first breathing of ease be to mankind, if, after the reciprocal torments of so many ages, they were all to leave off together, and become harmless at once ! But without hoping yet for the promised time of universal innocence, when men *shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain,** and in consequence of it *shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away:†* at present, in each particular instance, whoever only takes off his hand from those on whom it lies heavy, cannot fail to give them great joy : and if he doth it in a proper manner, may secure to himself as much gratitude from them, as by the highest unmerited obligation. Ill usage of others naturally makes them our enemies : the marks of their enmity provoke to worse usage of them : and so the evil increases without end, unless the injurious party hath the wisdom to stop first : and then it is generally in his power, by an honourable acknowledgment of his fault, or, perhaps, a mere intimation that he is convinced of it, not only to be forgiven, but respected and beloved ever after. And who doth not know, how pleasing the consciousness of being esteemed is, how mortifying that of being hated ?

There would indeed be little occasion comparatively for the exercise of kindness amongst men, if practices of a contrary tendency were not so frequent. A very great part of our good actions is really nothing more, than endeavouring to undo the harm, that we or others

* Isai. xi. 9.

† Isai. xxxv. 10.

have done. And abstaining from doing any would take away the necessity of them ; would strike at the root of misery, prevent the shocking sight of it, the burden and expence of relieving it. Remedies for evils are painful, uncertain, imperfect things : always to be applied indeed, when they are wanted : but the true precaution is, not to give being to unhappiness. Were we all to take the utmost care, there would, notwithstanding, be too much of it. But the obligation and means of lessening it would be more evident : Mens dispositions, when purged from ill-will, insolent negligence, and perverse caprice, would be more tender and compassionate ; and *from the good treasure of the heart, good things would be brought forth abundantly.** With such a temper, every one would enjoy most comfortable reflections within himself : and, though his condition were ever so low and disadvantageous, would be often useful in one way or another, and constantly agreeable, to all around him. We are formed to give and receive mutual pleasure : and our common daily conversation would be delightful to us, if wrongs, and unkindnesses, and slights, did not estrange us from, and set us against. each other. Bad as we are, designing, suspicious, gloomy, haughty, neglectful, provoking ; society is necessary for us ; we have hardly any notion of cheerfulness without it : but what should we think and find it, were we assured of the friendliness and regard of all we met ? The very being together, the countenance of man, would be reviving : and continual opportunities of innocent entertainment would spring up, besides the occasional ones of reciprocal service and assistance in matters of consequence. But of these also there would be more and greater, when we were once inclined to look for

* Matth. xii. 35.

them, than we can well conceive now. And though a person could do good only in small instances, it would be pure and unmixed; and that alone would be sufficient to make it considerable. But were it ever so little: though man judges by outward acts, the valuable thing in the sight of God is virtuous intention: and the fundamental part of that, is care to avoid evil. In proportion as we root out hurtful inclinations, right ones will not fail to shoot up, and bring forth fruit: if in less quantity, yet such as will be accepted; but probably in plenty.

*Love, saith the Apostle, worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.** Accordingly we find righteousness, which, taken strictly, is nothing but abstaining from injustice, often mentioned in Scripture, as the whole of our duty: because, if we begin with that, the rest will easily follow. And David, in describing the qualifications of the man, that *shall abide in the Tabernacle of the Lord, and dwell on his holy hill*, principally insists on the negative ones. *He that leadeth an uncorrupt life, and doth the thing which is right, and speaketh the truth from his heart. He that hath used no deceit in his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbour.†* Again, the above-mentioned Apostle joins the character of mere innocence with the most honourable title, which can be given to men: *that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke:‡* a character, which it is the peculiar prerogative of him, who is in the highest sense the Son of God, to deserve in perfection. But, as St. Peter observes, *he hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.§*

* Rom. xiii. 10.

† Psal. xv. 2, 3.

‡ Phil. ii. 15.

§ 1 Peter ii. 21, 22.

Thus I have endeavoured to shew you the importance of the plain humble duty of an inoffensive life: a duty, which, if experience did not prove the contrary, one should imagine there could be no need of using many words to recommend: as it appears impossible to reflect on wilful transgressions of it, and the mischiefs they cause, without horror. It is true, sufferings of all kinds are now so common in the world, that, unless it be when we ourselves, or they who are dear to us, undergo them, they are apt to make but little impression upon us: and we can pronounce that melancholy variety of dreadful words, which the miseries of mankind have introduced into language, almost without concern. But would we only recollect a while; consult our own memories, for they can generally inform us too well; or learn from such accounts, if there be occasion, as it is easy to procure; what those feelings are, which the terms, grief, anxiety, pain, anguish, dejection, despair, and more of the same sort, were framed to express: surely we should have a strong conviction, that for a human creature to inflict any of these on one of his brethren, without necessity and without authority, merely for some trifling provocation, or poor worldly advantage, to gratify some base appetite, or perhaps only to indulge a silly whim, is most frightful wickedness. For, terrible evils as they are in themselves, being exposed to them unjustly aggravates them so, as to make often the severest part of their torment. Then to think too of such things, as done to each other by short-lived helpless wretches, that are subject to unavoidable burdens, heavier than they know how to bear: to think of these, deliberately doubling and trebling their mutual sorrows: in direct contradiction to the exigency of their own circumstances, which loudly require of them forbearance, compassion, bene-

science; to the dictates of their own consciences, which reproach them for every harsh action or expression they are guilty of; and to his known will and positive commands, from whom they have received all that they enjoy, and on whom it depends, whether they shall be everlastingly happy or miserable: it is so amazing, that no tongue can set forth, no heart conceive sufficiently, the sinfulness or the folly of such conduct. His great design is the good of his creation. He requires us not to obstruct it, but contribute to it. This is the principal mark of gratitude, which our bounteous benefactor desires of us: the principal duty, which our Lawgiver and Judge enjoins us. We, at all adventures, resolve to disregard him whenever we please; and boldly pursue our worldly interests, our sensual appetites, our ill-natured passions, our wayward humours, our wildest fancies, right or wrong, let who will be the worse for it. What notion can a man have of himself, who acts thus: what notion of his Maker, to hope it can ever end well? We are accustomed to it indeed; and therefore may be tempted to look on it as a slight matter. But our Maker will determine at last, not according to the prejudices of men, but the truth of things. We are disposed to entertain very favourable opinions of our own behaviour: and even when we see it to be wrong, if we are of low degree, we hope to be passed over as inconsiderable; if of high, to be treated hereafter with some peculiar tenderness and deference. But *God is no respecter of persons* :* the meanest is not beneath his notice; the greatest is not above his power; the difference between them is as nothing in his eyes; and both shall be punished or rewarded according to their deeds. May he therefore grant us all to take imme-

* Acts x. 34.

diately the only method of shunning his wrath, and securing his favour, by considering our ways impartially, for else we may believe things to be allowable, nay commendable, which are highly criminal: by holding fast our integrity, so far as we have hitherto preserved it; by *ceasing to do evil and learning to do well*, in whatever respects we are faulty or deficient: by faith in his mercy for pardon, and his grace for strength, through the merits and mediation of our blessed Redeemer: to whom, &c.

S E R M O N XXV.

2 SAM. xii. 13.

AND DAVID SAID UNTO NATHAN, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST THE LORD. AND NATHAN SAID UNTO DAVID, THE LORD ALSO HATH PUT AWAY THY SIN: THOU SHALT NOT DIE.

IN holy Scripture, not only the great and good actions of pious persons are *written for our learning*,* that we may admire, and, as far as we are concerned, imitate them; but their chief transgressions also are recorded, for a caution to be on our guard, and a direction, if, like them, we have done amiss, like them, to repent and reform. Amongst all the instances of this kind, there is none more fruitful of instruction, than that well-known history of David's being seduced from a religious course of life to most dreadful wickedness, and continuing regardless of his guilt till the Prophet Nathan at length having awakened him to a sense of it, by a home application of the parallel case of the poor man and the ewe lamb, brought him to the confession, and administered to him the comfort expressed in the text.

There are many circumstances in this narration, which may and ought to remind us of truths, in which we are too nearly interested. But the principal of

* Rom. xv. 4.

them will be comprehended, if we learn from it the following points of doctrine.

I. That without continual care, the best of men may be led into the worst of crimes.

II. That we are all very apt to overlook our own faults, and yet to be extremely quick-sighted and severe in relation to those of others.

III. That as soon as ever we are, by any means, made sensible of our offences, we should acknowledge them with due penitence.

IV. That, on doing this, the greatest sins will be forgiven us. Yet,

V. That sins even after they are forgiven, produce frequently such lamentable consequences, that, on this account, amongst others, innocence is greatly preferable to the truest repentance.

I. That without continual care the best of men may be led into the worst of crimes.

David, we are told in holy writ, was *a man after God's own heart* :* who *did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him, all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.* † Such high expressions are never to be interpreted of any mere man in the utmost rigour : but the lowest meaning must be, that he was, on the whole, to a very high degree, innocent of known deliberate sin ; and exemplary for piety and virtue, to the age he lived in : when even they, who in some things were favoured with revelations from above, were in others, being left to their own reason, less enlightened than common Christians are now, and therefore intitled to a more favourable judgment. But independently on this considera-

* 1 Sam. xiii. 14. Acts xiii. 22.

† 1 Kings xv. 5.

tion, David's eminence in goodness appears from many excellent actions, related throughout the book of Samuel: and the Psalms, written by him, are everlasting instances of his fervent devotion, his reverent esteem of God's law, his watchfulness over his own spirit. Nay, indeed, there is one instance in which he appears to have been scrupulous even to an extremity of delicacy: when *his heart smote him, that he had cut off the skirt of Saul's garment.** Suppose, now, the Prophet Nathan had foretold concerning such a man as this, that in a little time he would commit the capital sin of adultery; and, when the scheme which he had framed to hide it was frustrated, would calmly contrive to murder by treachery the man whom he had injured, intrust others with his purpose, execute it by their means, and triumphantly take his wife home to himself: who could possibly have believed the prediction; or how could David have received the most respectful warning against such enormities, but with contempt or indignation? Yet so it was: even this good man, even when grown old in religion, was guilty of deeds, which many habitual sinners, though prompted by youthful passion, and unrestrained by the fear of God, would still have abhorred.

And if this was the case of David, then *let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*† Few, it may be doubted, have the same warmth of right resolution; but all have the same deceitful nature: and therefore we must all be continually attentive; or we know not into what abominations we may be drawn. Every man hath within him the principles of every bad action, that the worst man ever did. And though in some they are languid, and seem scarce alive; yet, if fostered by indulgence, they will soon grow to incredible strength: nay, if only left to them-

* 1 Sam. xxiv. 5.

† 1 Cor. x. 12.

selves, will in seasons favourable to them, shoot up, and over-run the heart, with such surprising quickness, that all the good seed shall be choaked on a sudden by tares, which we never imagined had been within us. And what increases the danger is, that each of us hath some wrong inclination or other, it is well if not several, beyond the rest natural to us, and the growth of the soil. These, therefore, we must be especially diligent to keep under, and weed out the least fibres of them that we can perceive: else we shall find them *roots of bitterness, continually springing up to trouble and defile us.** Then, besides all our inward weaknesses, the world about us is thick set around with snares, differently formed: some provoking us to immoderate passion, or envious malignity; some alluring us with forbidden pleasures, or softening us into supineness and indolence, or *overcharging our hearts with the cares of this life,†* or bribing us with hopes of unlawful gain to do ill, or terrifying us with a prospect of sufferings for doing well. Delusive suggestions, indeed, every one of them: but of specious appearance, unless we examine them thoroughly, unless we look beyond them. And as more or fewer of these temptations are almost constantly, and often suddenly, attacking us, to which the wicked one will not fail to superadd his own secret insinuations, as far as ever he is permitted; the hazard of our situation is very evident, and our watchfulness ought surely to be in proportion to it.

Not that, with all this, we have the least cause to be disheartened, but only on our guard. He that imagines himself to be safe, never is so: but they, who keep in their minds a sense of their danger, and pray for, and trust in, help from God, will always be able to avoid or go through it. Temptation hath no power, the

* Heb. xii. 15.

† Luke xxi. 34.

great tempter himself hath no power, but that of using persuasion. Forced we cannot be, so long as we are true to ourselves. Our own consent must be our own giving: and without it, the rest is nothing. For then only, in effect, St. James tells us,* *is eveey man tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and inticed.* That we are liable to sin, therefore, ought to be no discouragement, and can be no justification, to us: for, by the assistance of Heaven, though not else, we may escape it if we will: and that assistance is expressly promised to our endeavours and our prayers. *Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you: draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.*† But to the strictest vigilance it must be a powerful incitement, to consider, how often we, how often persons much better than we, have merely through want of vigilance, been guilty of such transgressions as could never have been suspected. But, indeed, when once we allow ourselves to go wrong, we can neither know nor guess how far we shall go.

David at first violated only the rules of decency, which he might easily have observed, and have turned away his eyes from an improper object. This, which doubtless he was willing to think a very pardonable gratification of nothing worse than curiosity, carried him on far beyond his first intention, to the heinous crime of adultery. There, undoubtedly, he designed to stop, and keep what had passed secret from all the world. But virtue hath ground to stand upon; vice hath not: and if we give way at all, the tendency downward increases every moment. Sometimes the treacherous pleasantness of the path invites us to stray a little farther, though we are sensible it descends to the gates of hell. Sometimes the consciousness, that we are guilty already, tempts us to

* James i. 14.

† James iv. 7, 8.

fancy it immaterial how much more we become so without reflecting, that by every sin which we add, we diminish the hope of retreat, and augment the weight of our condemnation. Sometimes again, as in the case before us, one act of wickedness requires another, or many more, to cover it: and they, whom no fear of God, or shame of doing evil, could awe sufficiently, have yet such a preposterous fear of men, and shame of being found out, that to avoid a discovery, they will commit still worse evil, and then be discovered at last. Thus did David. After he had tried in vain to conceal his adultery from Uriah by an artifice, which the gallant soldier, without knowing it, disappointed from a principle of honour: he was driven to the most horrible of all wickedness, murder; and a murder too, accompanied with the heaviest aggravations: deliberately planned, brought about by treachery, in which also he involved the general at least, if not many others of the army, as his instruments: and made the poor man himself, as if he had not been injured and deceived enough before, the bearer of those letters, which doomed him to die, innocent of all misbehaviour, of all imputation of misbehaviour, and valiantly fighting for his sovereign, by whom he was betrayed and assassinated.

In this dreadful manner was one, who had been till then of an excellent character, hurried on, from a single, and seemingly slight, indulgence, into the depth of the grossest and most shocking villainies. And in the like manner may any one, if he is not upon his guard against *the deceitfulness of sin*,* be hurried unawares to his final destruction. That sin, indeed, with which David began, is peculiarly insnaring and pernicious. The lower degrees of im-

* Heb. iii. 13.

modesty lead on imperceptibly to the most unlawful familiarities. These entangle persons in a variety of difficulties, that reduce them to do the basest and cruellest things that can be. And particularly as unchastity induced David to treachery and murder, so there hath been in all times more treachery, and more murder, of rivals, of poor innocent children, of one another, of themselves, occasioned by it, than perhaps by any other transgression whatever.

But all others have, in their several proportions, the tendency of sinking us into deeper guilt. Lesser instances of dishonesty lead, often by slow, but usually sure, steps, to the more enormous and capital crimes of that sort. Lesser instances of undue parsimony grow insensibly into the meanest and most sordid avarice: lesser instances of greediness of gain, into the most hard-hearted rapaciousness. And on the other hand, little negligences in their affairs, little affectations of living above their ability, little pieces of expensive vanity and extravagance, are the direct road to those confirmed habits of carelessness and prodigality, by which people foolishly and wickedly ruin themselves and their families, and too commonly others besides their own. After the same manner, slight expressions, in words or behaviour, of contempt or ill-humour, easily swell into the fiercest contention, the bitterest resentment, the most rancorous hatred. And, to specify no more particulars, mere indolent omissions of religious duties, public or private, leave our sentiments of piety to languish and decay, till we become utterly unmindful of our eternal interest: and, it may be, at last profane scoffers and blasphemers against God. Always, therefore, beware of small sins. Great ones carry something in them, that startles and alarms: but these, insinuating themselves

more gently, gain admittance more readily ; and so, as the son of Sirach wisely observes, *He that con-temneth little things, shall fall by little and little.**

II. The next point to be observed from this part of Scripture-history is, that men are very apt to overlook their own misdemeanors, and yet to be extremely quick-sighted and severe in relation to those of others.

The facts which David had committed were the plainest, the most palpable, the most crying sins that could be : nothing, one should think, to excuse them ; nothing to disguise them ; no name but their own to call them by : adultery, falsehood, murder. From the first to the last there must have intervened some considerable space of time, with a great deal of thought upon the subject : yet no reflection that deterred him from prosecuting his wicked schemes. Even after the murder, many months appear to have passed before Nathan was sent to him : still David had not recollected himself, but seemed to go on in perfect tranquillity. Nay, which is more astonishing than the rest, when the Prophet had contrived a story on purpose to convict him of his guilt, representing the first part of it so exactly, that nothing, which was not the same under different names, could be liker, it never once brought it, so far as appears, to his memory. Yet all this while he had not, in the least degree, lost the sense of what was right and wrong in general. So far from it, that he was moved with the most vehement abhorrence of the rich man's barbarous injustice and oppression, in taking away his poor neighbour's lamb from him, when he had plenty of his own. *And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man : and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man,*

* Eccclus. xix. 1.

that hath done this thing, shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.

How surprising a blow must this be! In the midst of his wrath, when forgetful of his own iniquity, he had not only adjudged a person, much less culpable, to pay the legal penalty of a quadruple restitution, but, from excessive detestation of his crime, indeed a hateful one, had even, contrary to law, pronounced sentence of death upon him; then to be told, *Thou art the man!* Let us often think of this case: and as often remember, that, with equal truth, though God forbid it should be in an equal measure, the same thing holds concerning every one of us. We all know our duty, or easily may: we are all abundantly ready at seeing and censuring what others do amiss: and yet we all continue, more or less, to do amiss ourselves, without regarding it. The main precepts of life, such as we are most apt to fail in, are partly obvious to reason, partly taught with sufficient clearness by revelation. And though, for want of cultivating their own understandings, or hearkening to God's word, some wicked actions, plausibly disguised, may be esteemed, by too many, allowable, or even laudable; yet the mask is not hard to pull off; and the more heinous sort, indeed the higher degrees of all, have a deformity almost incapable of being hidden. Let all the sophistry in the world recommend, let all the powers upon earth enjoin, irreligion, cruelty, fraud, promiscuous lewdness: it will, notwithstanding, be altogether impossible, either to make the practice of them tolerable to society, or to change in all the inward abhorrence of them, which mankind in general are led by nature to entertain. It is true, where iniquity of any kind is

once publicly practised and allowed, human minds are apt to be strangely blinded in relation to it, especially if they have no revelation from above to direct them. And even though the bulk of a nation be more enlightened and more virtuous, yet, in some persons, on some occasions, natural sentiments may be weakened or depraved, by early wrong notions and immoral habits; as in others common understanding is impaired, or lost, by bodily disorders. It may also in cases of intricacy be doubted, whether such an action deserves such a name; while yet, if it doth, it is allowed to be bad. But still the majority even of Heathens, and surely then of Christians, do or may, for the most part, as clearly discern what is blameable and commendable, as what is crooked and streight. Let this be tried in a transaction of any distant age or country, or in a feigned piece of history, such as the prophet invented for David; and, unless they suspect it to be designed as a parallel for themselves, they will very seldom fail, if they consider at all, of passing a righteous sentence. Let it be tried in the conduct of an acquaintance or contemporary; the principal danger will be, of a sentence too rigorous. For if the sin, brought in question before us, be one to which we have no inclination, we shall be sure to censure it, without the least mercy. And though it be one of which we have been guilty, provided our guilt be unknown or forgotten, we can usually declare against it as harshly, as the most innocent person alive. Or how moderate soever the consciousness of our own past behaviour might otherwise dispose us to be: yet if once we come to be sufferers ourselves by the same kind of sins, which we have formerly indulged, and perhaps often made others suffer by them, then we can be immoderately loud in our complaints of what

formerly we fancied, or pretended, had little or no hurt in it. Nay, without any such provocation, few things are commoner, than to hear people condemn their own faults in those around them: and, sometimes possibly to blind the world, but very frequently because they are blind to themselves, vehemently exclaiming against vices to which, if all that know them are not strangely mistaken, they are most notoriously addicted. Not uncommonly, indeed, this is the true reason of such invectives. One man's pride or selfishness stands in the way of another, just as proud, or as selfish: and he hath no patience to see any one else do what he wants to do without controul.

Now these instances prove we are convinced, that all sorts of sins are wrong: only we err in the application of our conviction. No one's failings escape us, but our own: and of them the most glaring escape us. Self-love persuades us to think favourably of our conduct in general: a secret suspicion which we labour to stifle, restrains us from examining much into particulars: what we are strongly disposed to do, we think we must, for the sake of inward peace, endeavour to believe harmless or excusable: this puts us on seeking out for real or imaginary differences of circumstances, which, we flatter ourselves, make that either innocent, or nearly so, in us, which in others ought not to be borne. Then, in some things, the bounds between lawful and unlawful are hard to be exactly determined. Now unfair minds lay hold on these difficulties with inexpressible eagerness: and chusing, not, as they should, the safer side, but that, to which the bias within attracts them, proceed, under the cover of such doubts, to the most undoubted wickedness: as if, because it is not easy to say precisely, at what moment

of the evening light ends and darkness begins, therefore midnight could not be distinguished from noon-day. Thus, because it cannot be ascertained, just how much every one ought to give in charity, too many will give nothing, or next to nothing. Because the price of labour, and of the commodities produced by it, have no absolute standard; they will to the utmost oppress the poor in their wages, or the valuation of what they bring to sell; and nevertheless make the most unconscionable demands on those, who come to buy of them. Because no one can settle to a nicety, what sobriety and temperance permit, and no more: therefore men will *feed themselves without fear,** and *tarry long at the wine,†* make *their belly their God, and glory in their shame.‡* Because it cannot be exactly decided, how much time is the most that we may allowably spend in recreation and amusement: therefore multitudes will consume almost the whole of their days in trifling and levity and folly, instead of applying to the proper business of life, in order to *give their account with joy to Him, who shall judge the quick and the dead.§*

These and the like things they will, some of them, defend and palliate with wonderful acuteness; designed partly to excuse them to others, but chiefly to deceive and pacify themselves. Not that they ever attain either of these ends. For their neighbours, after all, just as plainly perceive their faults, as they perceive those of their neighbours. And it is but a half deceit, that they put upon their own souls. Every now and then they see through it, whether they will or will not; see a very threatening prospect before them: and, though they do shut their eyes, and slumber

* Jude 12.

† Prov. xxiii. 30.

‡ Phil. iii. 19.

§ Heb. xiii. 17.

1 Pet. iv. 5.

again, and tell themselves all is peace ; yet this dream of security is but a very disturbed one : nothing like the clear and joyful perception, that he hath, whose conscience is thoroughly awake, and assures him of his own innocence, or true repentance, and interest in the pardon, which his Redeemer hath purchased. But in however *strong delusion** God may permit them to remain at present : how can they be sure, but ere long remorse may seize them, an adversary expose them, a friend rebuke them : one way or other, the case of David, who doubtless thought he was exceedingly safe, become theirs ; and some voice proclaim aloud to them, what they are afraid of whispering to themselves, *Thou art the man !* Though indeed, could we effectually impose on all the world, and our own minds too ; could this imposition last to our life's end, and not vanish at the approach of death, which commonly represents to the guilty their past conduct in a very new and tremendous light ; what could we get by it, but more certain and exquisite misery ?

Therefore one of the happiest things imaginable is being made sensible of our sins in time : and the first step to that is, reflecting how liable we are, both to commit them and to overlook them. If such a one as David could fall into such transgressions as he did, and continue in them so long, and forget them so intirely : into how many gross ones, into how many more speciously coloured over, may we have fallen in the course of our lives, negligent as we are : And how possible is it, unless we have faithfully searched our hearts, that we may be thoughtlessly going on to a future state, and some of us near it, under heavy loads of complicated guilt ! Surely self-inspection then is absolutely necessary : and if we set about the work

* 2 Thess. ii. 11.

honestly, it is by no means difficult. What passes within our breasts is not far from us: what hath passed there formerly may, in general, be recollected: and what we are usually forced to take much pains to hide from ourselves, we may, if we will, soon lay open. Let us each therefore, consider seriously, as persons whose interest lies in discovering, not concealing: Is there no *way of wickedness in me*,* no blot upon my conduct and character? No failing that I should reproach my neighbour for; none that my enemy or ill-wisher, at least if he knew all, as I do, and God doth, could reproach me for? Are there not, indeed, several things of this kind, and how many, and what are they? For it is my concern to know them all; and to think, what the end of all will be. Such an inquiry as this would call off our attention from the too pleasing employment of judging those around us, to a more important trial within. We should see, that if they have faults, so have we likewise great ones, though it may be of different kinds: and which are worse upon the whole is for God alone to determine. Our common guilt acquits neither before him, excuses neither for the mutual injuries they do, authorizes neither to disregard the censure of the world: but this effect the sense, how blame-worthy we all are, should certainly have: it should restrain even the best of us from reproving with haughtiness, and punishing with severity: it should incline the more obnoxious to be singularly gentle and mild in relation to offenders: and it should instruct us every one to think and act with great charity towards others, and employ our zeal chiefly, where there will seldom be danger of excess, in correcting and reforming ourselves. But this would bring me to the third head: to which I must not proceed at

* Psal. cxxxix. 24.

present: and shall therefore conclude with begging you to observe, concerning what you have heard already, that you will never become either duly sensible of your sinful dispositions and actual transgressions, or able to amend what you do find of them, unless you are first excited, and then assisted, by the grace of our blessed Saviour, *without whom we can do nothing*.* Therefore, whenever duties of any kind are pressed upon you, always remember, whether you are told it or not, that you must pray as well as endeavour: pray in his name, and *through faith in his blood*,† *who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*:‡ fully assured, that, weak as we are in ourselves, *we can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth us*:§ to whom, therefore, &c.

* John xv. 5. † Rom. iii. 25. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 30. § Phil. iv. 13.

S E R M O N XXVI.

2 SAM. xii. 13.

AND DAVID SAID UNTO NATHAN, I HAVE SINNED, AGAINST THE LORD: AND NATHAN SAID UNTO DAVID, THE LORD ALSO HATH PUT AWAY THY SIN, THOU SHALT NOT DIE.

FROM that portion of Scripture, in which these words are contained, I lately recommended to your serious notice the following points of doctrine.

I. That without continual care, the best of men may be led into the worst of crimes.

II. That we are all very apt to overlook our own faults, and yet to be extremely quick-sighted and severe in relation to those of others.

III. That as soon as ever we are, by any means, made sensible of our offences, we should acknowledge them with due penitence.

IV. That, on doing this, the greatest sins will be forgiven us. Yet,

V. That sins, even after they are forgiven, produce frequently such lamentable consequences, that on this account, amongst others, innocence is greatly preferable to the truest repentance.

On the two first of these I have already discoursed: and proceed now to the

III. That as soon as we are, by any means, made sensible of our offences, we ought to acknowledge them with due penitence.

David, it seems, till the Prophet came to put him

on considering his ways, had not done it to any good purpose, ever since the adultery and murder which he had committed: though a very little thought had been sufficient, and it is amazing, that he could avoid thinking enough, to shew him his guilt. Had he continued insensible of it, not all his past piety could have preserved him from future damnation. For the threatening which God commanded the Prophet Ezekiel to pronounce, ever hath been, and will be, without exception, the rule of his proceeding. *Son of Man, say unto the children of thy people, When I say to the righteous, that he shall surely live: if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered.* In his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.†* But, though it was not consistent with infinite justice, holiness and wisdom, to accept David, whilst in this condition: yet it was perfectly suitable to infinite goodness to awaken him out of it. Accordingly, Nathan was sent to him with a divine commission for that purpose: who having first endeavoured, without success, to execute it in a gentler and more respectful way, that of insinuating admonition, applied his parable at last in the plainest words; nor was content with telling him directly, *Thou art the man*, but undoubtedly finding it requisite, followed even this home-charge yet farther, by laying the particulars of his guilt, with its heavy aggravations, before his eyes. And here David's example begins to be as useful for our imitation, as it had been before for our warning. Struck to the very heart with the sense of so many and heinous iniquities, crowding in at once upon his mind; and abhorring himself for being able, first to commit, and then to overlook them;

* Ezek. xxxiii. 12, 13.

† Ezek. xviii. 24.

he cries out, *I have sinned against the Lord.* Few words, indeed; but greatly expressive; and the more, for being few. Astonishment, confusion, terror, might well stop the utterance of more for the present, and for no small time. Afterwards his sorrow obtained the relief of free vent: and his penitent Psalms, especially the fifty-first, composed, as the title informs us, on this very occasion, express, most pathetically, the depth of his humiliation, and the earnestness of his intreaties for pardon, even after he had been assured of it: for still the consciousness, that he was unworthy to receive it, would prompt him to beg it continually. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity: and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.** As if he had said, great as my crime is against my fellow-creatures, it is nothing, compared with that against my Creator. However secure I may be against their resentment, it yields me no comfort, while I continue an object of his wrath. You may read over the rest in private: the same spirit breathes from the beginning to the end. Now, the King might easily have given the Prophet a very different reception: have denied the fact, driven him from his presence, confined him as a madman, punished him as a false accuser: or might have broke off the discourse as soon as it grew painful, pleaded urgent affairs, and told him as Felix did Paul, even when he trembled under his preaching, *Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee:†* a season which he de-

* Psal. li. 1, 2, 3, 4.

† Acts xxiv. 25.

terminated should never come. Nay, truly, according to modern modes of thinking, he might have frankly owned the whole: treated the adultery as a trifle, especially in a person of any rank; and perhaps the murder too, as an undesirable consequence indeed, but an unavoidable one, of Uriah's absurd behaviour. For sinners have numberless arts to fence against the reproaches of others, and to pacify themselves. But David had now too affecting a conviction of the horrors of the state in which he had lived so long, once to think of adding to it fresh offences: and therefore, without the least anger at the Prophet, without the least excuse for his own conduct, without the least delay, he humbly confesses, *I have sinned against the Lord.*

Let all of us then, who like David have sinned, in whatever instance it be, greater or less, repent like David too: and, instead of perversely defending ourselves by the bad part of his example, resolve immediately to reform ourselves according to the good. Better were it also, that our amendment should be accomplished by our own private reflections on what we have done amiss: for this would manifest a greater sensibility of heart, and strength of good purpose, than if foreign aid appear to be wanting. But the case before us plainly shews that we have sometimes absolute need of other monitors, besides that within. For if a man, of so much piety and discernment as David had, was so long without thinking, and perhaps, left to himself, would never have thought effectually, of such flagrant crimes as his were: how highly necessary is some remembrancer to the generality of persons, who are so desirous to impose upon themselves, and in the many points of conduct, where that worst kind of delusion is so easily practised! As therefore

God appointed his Prophets formerly by occasional and extraordinary commissions, he hath now given the ministers of his word a standing and constant one, to *shew his people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.** We have not, as they had often, the cases of single persons revealed to us, and given us in charge : nor need we now, when the returns of public instruction and exhortation, comprehending all cases, are so frequent. We are not sent to this or that sinner by name : and it is but seldom, that we dare trust ourselves to undertake voluntarily a matter of such delicacy, as separate reproof or examination ; where false reports and opinions, prejudices and passions, may so probably occasion us to mistake, or be mistaken ; and circumstances without number may produce harm from our attempt, instead of good. From this place, therefore, we direct our warnings to you all in general : and deceive not yourselves, and injure not us, by suspecting us at any time of such wickedness and folly, as to think of pointing from hence at any one in particular. We leave it intirely to your own consciences to tell each of you in your turn, when your own guilt is touched, *Thou art the man.* We hope they tell you so faithfully, when we little imagine there is need of it : and the intent of the ministry committed to us, is, that they should. *For the word of God, intrusted with us, unworthy as we are, is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*† It is to him you lie open, and not to us, when you hear your bosom-sins described. It is from knowing, chiefly by the study of the holy Scriptures, what man-

* Isaiah lviii. 1.

† Heb. iv. 12.

kind are, that we speak, not from information what such or such a man is, when you fancy we hint at the failings of your neighbours. Use not therefore the preaching of the Gospel, either for a matter of reproach to them, or of accusation against us : but solely in subservience to its important design, the reformation of yourselves. Whenever the picture of deformity, which we draw, is not your own ; thank God for it, and forbear to consider, whom it may resemble. Whenever it is your own, in whole or in part, which the witness within your own breasts, will, if permitted, and perhaps though forbidden, plainly signify to you ; embrace the conviction meekly and sincerely : stand not against it, fly not from it ; but search the wound to the bottom, and let repentance *have its perfect work*.*

Indeed, let the person, that makes you known to yourselves, be ever so little authorized to do it, still you are indispensably concerned to take notice of it. If he profess himself a friend, he hath given you the truest and boldest proof of his friendship, that can be. If he be a mere acquaintance, or a stranger, but appear to admonish you with good intention ; you ought to esteem him for it as long as you live. And were you to believe him ever so much your enemy, never let that provoke you to become your own : think only, if he speaks truth, and submit to it ; amend, and disappoint him. Strive not to make yourselves easy in what you feel is wrong, but quit it. Strive not to colour over and palliate matters : for this is deceiving no one, but your own souls. If you are hitherto undiscovered by the world, leaving off is by far the likeliest way to be secure : if others know your faults, all you have remaining is to let them know your penitence

* James i. 4.

too. On this, whoever hath any sense, either of religion or humanity, will treat you tenderly. But whatever shame may attend acknowledging errors and changing wrong courses, it is only part of what they have deserved; and we had much better be ashamed in this life, than the next. Sooner or later, every sinner must repent: and the single question is, whether it shall be hereafter, when grief will serve only for an ingredient in our misery; or now, while it may intirely prevent the danger, and be followed immediately by comfort and joy. Surely this case is much too clear to admit of doubt. And therefore let us all zealously pursue the advice given to Job: *If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacle. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot: yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear** No sooner had David said, with due contrition of heart, *I have sinned against the Lord*, but Nathan revived him with that assurance, *The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die*: which is the ground-work of the observation to be made from the text,

IV. That if we repent as we ought, the greatest sins will be forgiven us.

This indeed our own reason cannot promise, with any certainty at all. God we know is good. Man is frail. And hence we have cause to hope, that his goodness will extend to the pardon of our frailties. But then, in proportion as we go beyond frailties, to gross, deliberate, wilful, habitual transgressions, this hope diminishes continually: till at length it becomes exceedingly doubtful; and especially to those, whose inward peace depends the most upon not doubting, whether the holiness of God's nature, and the honour

* Job xi. 14, 15.

of his universal government will suffer him to pardon some offenders at all, however penitent; whether any, without previous correction; (who knows what, or how long?) and whether he will bestow future happiness, for a greater time or a less, even where he may inflict no future punishment. Still, in the midst of these perplexities, be they ever so inextricable, repentance, including the amendment for which men have strength, is not only their duty, but their wisdom too: because insensibility of old sins, and addition of new ones will make their condition, bad as it may be, daily worse: and so far as any thing of their own doing can better it, reformation must. But knowledge of thus much only, though it affords very proper direction, suggests little comfort at the same time, or spirit to follow direction. And therefore every manifestation of his pleasure, which God hath made to man from the beginning, hath always carried in it some encouragement to trust in his mercy, beyond the motives which our unassisted faculties were able to furnish. Yet the pardon of such sins, attended with such aggravations, as David's were, had not, even in his days, by any means been expressly promised. And therefore this declaration of the Prophet must not only relieve him, in the agony of his guilt, from the dreadfullest apprehensions that can be conceived; on which account, we may presume, it was made to him so instantly: but must also diffuse consolation among multitudes, through that and the following ages, which could not fail to be acquainted with so extraordinary a case; and must incline all true penitents to believe, that theirs also, whatever it was, would, on like terms, obtain favour. But still it is easy to mistake in arguing from one case to another, especially our own: besides that particular instances do not amount to general

assurances. And though such assurances were given in the latter part of the Jewish revelation, chiefly by the Prophet Ezekiel:* yet it might not be clear to every one, whether they related to another life, or only to the present: nor was this revelation received, or known almost in any nation, excepting that one. The unlimited Gospel-promises therefore of forgiveness, and grace proclaimed to all the world, have made a change, unspeakably happy, in the condition of mankind.

And now, as we are strangely apt to apply every thing wrong, too many, instead of the extreme of despondency, run into that of profane boldness: and are very near looking upon sin, as nothing to be dreaded; and remission of sin, as nothing to be thankful for. At least the certainty of it, they conceive, they could easily have discovered of themselves: and therefore have little obligation to Christ, the publisher of a truth so obvious. Nor is it a wonder, if they, who think slightly of transgression, think slightly of pardon also: taking one to be a trifle, they must take the other to be a matter of course. But whoever considers in earnest what it is to have disobeyed the commands, and contradicted the wise and good purposes of the Almighty; to have injured his creatures, our own brethren; to have perverted the nature he hath given us; to have disqualified ourselves from doing and being what he made us for; and to have been guilty of all this, in spite of the expostulations of our consciences and our friends, and of his express threatenings of Hell-fire: far from entertaining presumptuous imaginations of safety, from any thing he can know by his own wisdom, or perform by his own strength, will earnestly long for instruction and help from above; and feel the most

* Exek. xviii. 21, 22, 23. xxxiii. 14, 15, 16.

affectionate gratitude to him, who hath not only revealed, but procured peace for us, at the price of his blood : offering up his life on the cross, Son of God as he was : so great was the difficulty, to make it consistent with justice and holiness to exercise mercy !

Indeed, after all that hath been done to assure us it shall be exercised, there are some of minds more tenderly sensible than ordinary, who, after committing great offences, or, perhaps, only such as to them appear very great, experience the utmost reluctance, either to be reconciled to themselves, or persuaded that God will be reconciled to them. And hence not a few of them plunge desperately into whatever folly or sin will drive away their uneasiness for the present ; while others go on in the most punctual practice of piety, but enjoy scarce any satisfaction from it, overwhelming themselves, on every occasion and none, with groundless terrors. The pernicious impatience of the former proceeds, in great measure, from a very absurd and criminal pride, which ought to be humbled by the prudent severity of just reproof. But the meek dejection of the latter calls for the tenderest compassion and the kindest encouragement ; yet, perhaps, intermixed now and then, with some degree of gentle chiding. To such therefore it must be said ; your grief and fear prove, that your heart is not hardened, but sincerely desirous to serve and please God : the good works, which he enables you to perform so regularly, prove your faith and repentance : the imperfections, which you bewail, all his children have, not you alone. *Why then are you cast down, and your soul disquieted within you ?** How ill soever you may think of yourselves ; though God requires you not in the least to think worse than the truth, and would

* Psalm xlii. 5.

have you judge calmly of your spiritual state, not under the disability of a fright : but whatever opinion you may form of your own deserts, forbear to entertain an injurious one of him. When he hath sent his blessed Son to make atonement for you, when he hath told you in his holy Word, when he tells you by his ministers every day, that this atonement reaches to the very worst of cases, do not except your own in contradiction to him : do not indulge doubts and scruples about what he hath plainly promised, in order to be miserable against his will : but, together with the sorrow of having offended, allow yourselves to feel the joy of being restored to favour. A wise and good parent would wish to have his child affected only in a moderate manner with a sense of his past faults, when once he is returned to his duty : and though still he hath the weaknesses incident to his tender age, doth not reject him for them, or desire he should sink under them ; but strive against them with a cheering belief, that he shall out-grow them, as he approaches to maturity. Why will you not reflect then, that, *like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful to them that fear him ? For he knoweth whereof we are made ; he remembereth that we are but dust.**

It is extremely unhappy, that when persons attend public discourses on religion, in which different instructions, designed for as different sorts of auditors, must however be spoken to all sorts promiscuously, each, for the most part, applies to himself just what doth not belong to him, notwithstanding the best care to prevent it. The bold sinner confides most securely in what he hears of God's mercy : while the low-spirited penitent almost dies away at the mention of

* Psalm ciii. 13, 14.

his justice. The first hath no dread of the most wilful sins, because the nature of man is frail: the last hath no peace about the most excusable deficiencies, because the precepts of the Gospel are strict. We can only caution them, not to mistake thus: and beg they would have a more serious regard, on the one side, to their future happiness; on the other, to their present comfort. It grieves us to think of the terrors, that we may sometimes occasion those to suffer, who have no need to suffer any at all. But we must of necessity give out the strongest warnings against the greatest danger: and run the risque, if we cannot avoid it, of making a few good persons uneasy without cause, rather than leave many bad ones asleep in fatal self-flattery. For indeed the doctrine of forgiveness, though in itself the most ingenuous motive to thankful piety and obedience, is too often most disingenuously perverted to encourage transgression. Repentance, men argue, is sure to obtain pardon: and pardon restores us to the state we were in before we did amiss. What need have we then to scruple going a little wrong, when the method of setting all right again immediately is so plain before us? But, in reality, true repentance, a thorough change of temper and purpose, manifested by a course of suitable conduct, will be found, neither a short, nor an easy work; but one exceeding the power of man, without the help of God. And not to say how uncertain it is, whether God will give these artful contrivers time to repent effectually, what prospect is there in the least, that they will have a heart to do it? When once they have been so deliberately base and wicked, as to rebel against him for that very reason, which ought, of all others, to have made them dutiful to him;

where is the likelihood, that they will ever become so honest and good, as to return and serve him faithfully? No alteration requires a larger share of his grace to effect it: and no sinners have less ground to expect any share of it, than these. But were it ever so probable, that even such offenders might come to amend their doings, yet there is an awful observation, arising from the history before us, which remains to be insisted on,

V. That wickedness, even after it is forsaken, and after it is forgiven, produces nevertheless very often consequences so lamentable, that for this cause, amongst others, innocence is greatly preferable to the sincerest and completest repentance, that ever was.

In the very same breath, that Nathan tells David *the Lord had put away his sin*, he tells him also of a trying affliction, and a very trying one it proved, that he should immediately undergo, on account of that sin. *Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child, that is born unto thee, shall surely die.** Nor could the most fervent intercessions of the royal penitent reverse the decree. Nay, the threatening prediction, which the Prophet made to him before his repentance, that because *he had killed Uriah with the sword, the sword should not depart from his house*; and as he had polluted his wife, his own should be polluted in the sight of the sun,† was permitted to befall him, notwithstanding his repentance, with great exactness. Nor doth there need much reflection upon what passes in the world to see, that Providence, to this day, frequently suffers

* 2 Sam. xii. 14.

† 2 Sam. xii. 9—12.

events of a like nature to happen : partly to complete the humiliation of the sinner, partly that others may *hear and fear*.*

Sometimes no immediate connection between the transgression and the suffering is visible, that it may seem to be the hand of God, rather than a natural effect ; though indeed, would men consider, every effect proceeds from his hand : but commonly they are closely linked, to deter men from committing iniquity, by shewing them before-hand, what fruits they must expect it to produce. Indeed, were only the pain inseparable from repentance, the feeling of having done ill and deserved ill, to distinguish the condition of him who returns to his duty, from his who has always adhered to it ; the distinction would be very interesting and important. For how wide is the difference between hating and approving ourselves : between thinking of God with dread and shame, and rejoicing in him as *our trust from our youth,† and our portion for ever !‡* But long after peace is restored within, which yet will never be so restored to great offenders, as not to leave matter of melancholy reflection ; long after penitents are at ease with respect to their future state ; afflicting consequences, with respect to the present, will flow from what they have done amiss. Often they have hurt themselves, alienated their friends, lost their time and opportunities of doing well in the world, injured their characters, their fortunes, their healths : often they have hurt others, set mischievous examples, enticed, betrayed, oppressed, provoked those around them, and destroyed, perhaps, by short follies, what the endeavours of the rest of their days will never be able to repair. These, indeed, are considerations, under

* Deut. xiii. 11.

† Psal. lxxi. 5.

‡ Ib. lxxiii. 16.

which they should not despond: but surely others ought to take warning from them, and learn of how unspeakable value it is, to *keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right,** from the very first. Life was not intended to be led inconsistently; one part in doing wrong, the other in being sorry for it. Uniform obedience is our Maker's demand: and whoever departs from it wilfully, though he may return, will assuredly be made to *know and see*, one way or other, that it is *a thing evil and bitter, that he hath forsaken the Lord his God †*. Let those then, who experience this in themselves, submit to it with patience, and revere his justice: let those, who see it in others, thankfully make use of the instruction it was graciously designed to give them; and let us all preserve a lively sense upon our souls, that *evil pursueth sinners, but to the righteous good shall be repaid. ‡*

* Psalm xxxvii. 38. † Jer. ii. 19. ‡ Prov. xiii. 21.

S E R M O N XXVII.

EPH. v. 11.

AND HAVE NO FELLOWSHIP WITH THE UNFRUITFUL WORKS
OF DARKNESS : BUT RATHER REPROVE THEM.

IF the practice of their duty were general amongst men, it would appear to all of us as we come forward into life, notwithstanding our present proneness to sinful indulgences, extremely natural and easy. For as its reasonableness always recommends it to our understandings, and its amiableness to our affections, when unbiassed : so, in these circumstances, the public example of goodness would engage our imitation, the universal esteem of it excite our ambition, and its beneficial consequences plainly shew it to be our true present interest. Allurements to unlawful pleasures would then be comparatively few ; provocations to mutual injuries none ; consciousness of right behaviour would make men pleased with themselves ; reciprocal acts of justice and kindness would make them happy in each other ; and experience, that their being was a blessing to them, would produce in their souls affectionate sentiments of reverential gratitude to the bountiful Author of it. Such we should have found the world, if sin had not entered into it : and such we might still in a good measure bring it to be, if we would ; if most of us did not, besides filling our own lives with guilt and misery, contribute, by a variety of wrong behaviour,

to render our fellow-creatures also wicked and wretched. This we all see and feel to be the real state of things: but how do we act upon it? We complain grievously of each other, for the faults which we each of us go on to commit; we complain even of providence because the world is—only what we have made it; and alledge the misconduct of our neighbours for a defence of our own, instead of trying to mend ourselves or them: whereas, evidently our concern is, to *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*; to preserve our own souls from the epidemic distemper, and warn those around us of the danger of being infected. But it is with the security of our personal innocence, that we are to begin: without which we shall seldom in earnest attempt, and scarce ever successfully prosecute, the reformation of any one else; nor will the greatest success in such endeavours avail us, if, as our Apostle expresses it, *when we have preached to others, we ourselves are cast-aways**.

The first and principal consideration then is, how to avoid any *fellowship with the unfruitful*, a gentle term, which means pernicious, *works of darkness*. Now a main point of caution against all sorts of peril is to know, from whence chiefly we are to apprehend it. But who can say, from what quarter our virtue runs the greatest risque, in a world so thick set round with various temptations: where all vices are so common, that it seems a matter of course, and almost a necessity, to indulge one or another; and the majority of the guilty is so large, that each considers himself, in some degree, as safe in the crowd even from divine displeasure, *numbering himself amongst the multitude of sinners*, and not *remembering that wrath will not*

* 1 Cor. ix. 27.

tarry long :* where our eyes, and our ears continually present to our imaginations crimes, of which else we should never have thought, and suggest easy methods of attaining what we believed to be as impracticable, as we know it to be unlawful : where the prosperity of ill men so strongly prompts us to envy their condition, imitate their presumptuousness, and doubt of a superintending power : where every natural inclination that we have meets with something to inflame it beyond bounds, or turn it aside from its proper object : where fear of inconveniences threatening upright conduct, and hope of gaining advantages by deviations from it, work within us continually : where injuries real or fancied, are daily provoking us to injure or hate in return ; and even friendship and kind affection, meeting too often with undeserving objects, make us partial and unfair, subservient to the purposes of the bad or injudicious, and criminally negligent of the merits of the worthy ?

Here is already an alarming list of dangers : and yet one source of them remains unmentioned, so very fruitful, that probably it brings more of us to ruin than all the rest : I mean, our strong tendency to follow whatever precedents are set us : which being the great seducer of mankind to *have fellowship with one another in the unfruitful works of darkness*, I shall confine myself to the consideration of it in the sequel of this discourse.

A disposition to fall in with what we see others do is one of the earliest natural principles that we exert : and in itself a very beneficial one. For by means of it we learn, with ease and pleasure, a multitude of things necessary or serviceable in life : conform readily to the inclinations of those about us in a thousand matters of

* Eccclus. vii. 16.

indifference, and from mutual likeness become mutually agreeable. By the same means also were patterns of piety and virtue more frequent, or we more attentive to them, we might be excited, as undoubtedly it was designed we should, to copy, and even rival, each other's laudable qualities. But where things are capable of contrary uses, we generally make the worst of them: and in no case more than this. The example of evil, in a corrupted world, is by much the oftenest in our view: which the weak and indolent imitate without reflection: the good-humoured and pliable are drawn after them by the desire of pleasing, though in wrong ways; the vain and ambitious by fondness of excelling though in culpable attainments; and almost all by the shame of singularity and dread of ridicule: till the numbers of the faulty being thus become abundantly sufficient to keep one another in countenance, custom refuses to let its authority be any longer examined, and sets up itself as the sole rule of conduct.

For, even when we seem to act the most entirely from opinions and dispositions of our own, these, upon inquiry, will be frequently found to derive, if not their original, at least a great part of their strength, from the deference that we pay to the notions and practice of the world. Thus men speak and think slightly of religion, often without imagining they know any objection of weight against it: and yet how they can have the very lowest degree of belief in it, and not believe it to be an affair of the utmost importance, is quite inconceivable: but notwithstanding they treat it, without scruple, as a slight matter, because they see it commonly treated so. But this degree of depravity is not universal. We, perhaps, may blame those who do so, and with marks of great seriousness profess ourselves Christians: yet, it may

be, are easy in transgressing, in a higher degree or a lower, as occasion offers, almost every precept of Christianity, because others, who call themselves Christians also, do the same thing. We acknowledge that we are soon to leave this earth, and give an account to God of the part which we have acted upon it: yet perceiving, that most people about us overlook these awful truths, we can do so too, as absolutely, as if we had no concern in them. And, to be a little more particular: what is it that makes us in our common discourse so regardless of equity and humanity, so eager to speak evil and propagate scandal? Surely not always malignity of heart: and certainly very seldom any peculiar knowledge of the case, or interest in it. But such is the reigning turn of conversation, which we are wicked and weak enough to adopt and promote, at the very time that we inveigh bitterly against it, and suffer grievously by it. Again: how many are there who trifle away their days, in thinking of and doing nothing that tends to any one good purpose, only because such trifling is fashionable! How many affect follies and vices, to which, at the bottom, they have little or no liking, which are highly prejudicial, and will probably be fatal to them, merely because they are in vogue: and for no wiser a reason will persevere in them, when nature cries aloud to have them left off! How many distress and undo themselves and their families, by imprudently vying with the luxury and expensiveness of those about them, nay, of those above them! And, in general, from what is it else, than taking it on trust from common persuasion, that possessing the things of this world is happiness; though we not only may observe the contrary in all whom we know, but feel it in ourselves; that we pursue them through sins and through sufferings of all kinds, and admire and detest one

another on account of them, at the rate we do? What, indeed, else could support the absurdity of seeking our chief good where plainly it is not, but that we all see one another do so, and will persuade ourselves, against the fullest evidence, that so universal an attachment must be well grounded?

But the example of a small part of mankind is often sufficient to lead us into strange errors. Where party-zeal of any kind prevails, into what monstrous opinions of men and things, what utter disregard to all truth and justice, to public spirit and humanity, will men run one after another! Indeed they will do things, when united in bodies, which, taken singly, they would abhor: nay, will think they justify their own behaviour completely, by alledging only, that it is the same with that of their opposers, whom they condemn as the worst of men. Sometimes a less authority than this proves able to misguide us: and a blind prepossession in favour of a few persons, or a single one, shall seduce us into a very unjustifiable imitation; and even make us, by the meanness of it, contemptible, or, by carrying it too far, guilty, when what we meant to copy was commendable, or however innocent.

Without specifying more instances, or enlarging on these, the mischiefs of being injudiciously *conformed to this world** appear so considerable, as to make the remedies which can be found for it extremely desirable. Now remedies of mischiefs vary with their causes: which in this case are numerous.

1. Some *follow the multitude to do evil*† from mere inconsiderateness: poor creatures, greatly to be pitied, and yet severely reprov'd. For, surely, enough depends on our chusing right in life, to make us think about it: and there is appearance enough of errors in

* Rom. xii. 2.

† Exod. xxiii. 2.

the common practice, to give us no little diffidence in a matter of such moment. But mankind in general being thoughtless, each individual, as he goes on with the rest, finding few or none different from himself to compare with, is hardly sensible of his own being so. Yet would we, in imagination, step out of the present scene of things for a while, consider ourselves as mere spectators, and view the course of them as they pass before us, how amazing would the sight be! The plain and only way to happiness, through the faithful cultivation of piety and virtue, almost unanimously neglected: nations and ages treading, in mutual implicit reliance, paths leading to destruction: the less faulty surprisingly apt to be dissipated in a hurry of amusements, or plod on in worldly business without higher attentions: the rest, by irregular passions, and unlawful pursuits, making themselves and their neighbours as wretched at present as they well can, and at the same time providing for unspeakably greater misery hereafter: every generation reminded, every single person seeing, on one occasion or another, in how wrong a course they are; yet shutting their eyes again, and going forward blindfold: none almost taking warning by the fate of his predecessors; but each leaving, in his turn, an useless admonition of his own to such as come in his stead. *This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings.** And shall we be of the number of those who act thus: or rather assert our right to judge for ourselves, where it concerns us so nearly? Such is the usage of the world: but is it the dictate of conscience, is it the road to happiness? The multitude, *blind leaders of the blind,*† have they reason, have they Scripture, have they the final event of things, to justify them? If not, let us chuse a safer

* Psal. xlix. 13.

† Matth. xv. 14.

guidance ; and apply the real rule of life to direct our steps : ask ourselves often, what we are doing, and what it tends to ? Stop short wherever we discern ground for suspicion ; beware of plausible pleas, for they often colour over the worst actions ; beware of indiscreet compliances, for they border nearly upon criminal ones ; and ever remember the son of Sirach's advice : *Go not in a way, wherein thou mayest fall. Be not confident in a plain way.** But above all let us beware of ourselves : and recollecting, as we have but too much cause, our natural supineness, and forgetfulness of the cautions that we so often receive, *give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip ;†* and set our hearts unto the words of God's law, for it is not a vain thing for us, because it is our life.‡

2. Others there are, not absolutely thoughtless about their conduct, but distrustful of their own judgment : born down by so great an authority, as the practice of all mankind appears to be, against seriousness in religion and strictness in virtue. But, universal as this practice may seem, there are many exceptions from it amongst all ranks, and some, God be praised, in the highest, of exemplary Christians, who, *in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shine as lights in the world.§* But were the apostacy more general than it is, yet being the effect of mere inconsiderateness or ungoverned passions, what weight can there be in the most perfect agreement of persons thus influenced ? Or if still the multitude together look formidable, separate them ; and consider singly, of whom the whole is composed. The much larger part will be acknowledged at first sight to be such, as we should be ashamed

* Eccclus. xxxii. 21, 22.

† Heb. ii. 1.

‡ Dent. xxxii. 46, 47.

§ Phil. ii. 15.

once to think of taking for our directors, in a point of any consequence. And for the rest: the rich and great are rather peculiarly exposed to temptation, and, of course, to fall, than qualified to discover and relish those momentous truths and rules of life, which humility and retirement into ourselves best dispose us to receive. The learned and knowing are liable to be misled into wrong judgments by the vanity of judging differently from common men; nor do they always act agreeably to what they inwardly think. And the reputed wise and able very frequently have never considered in earnest what the true wisdom of life is, but only busied themselves with a silly cunning to attain what they have rashly and falsely taken for the end, at which they were to aim.

But further: this universal consent, pleaded against observing the precepts of religion, is, when examined, no consent at all. For as the vices of men are contrary to each other, and every vicious temper is full of inconsistencies within itself: no one immoral course will ever be generally approved, nor almost any one immoral person continue long of the same opinion. The only thing, in which we shall find them agree, is that, which they all by turns own, that the conduct of the virtuous is right; and their own, wrong. Here, therefore, a pious and discreet man will easily raise an intestine war amongst the enemy: defend himself against one side by the authority of the other; indeed against all sides by the authority of all: and in conclusion resolve, slighting and pitying a divided giddy crowd, *in every good work to trust his own soul; for this is the keeping of the Commandments.**

3. Another strong inducement to have fellowship with the bad customs of the world, is desire of being

* Ecclus. xxxii. 23.

esteemed by it. But do the vicious really esteem one another? Do they not almost always hate or despise one another? Or suppose that, for joining in their sins and absurdities, you were sure to receive their applause as your reward. Perhaps the whole meaning of it is at the bottom no more than this: they want to keep themselves in countenance, being conscious that they have occasion for it, by adding as many as they can to their number; and their good opinion of you is thinking you weak enough to be drawn in for one. Or perhaps the superiority, which your innocence gives you over them, is painful to them; and they would fain bring you down to their own level. Or they have some interested design upon you, or they consider you as an instrument fitted to amuse and entertain them; and so extol you, while they deride you. This, you see, is not being admired: it is being made a tool. But were it otherwise: consider a little; what can such admiration be worth? How long will it be likely to last? And what must the consequences prove, now and to eternity? Why then, instead of courting outward regard from those, who inwardly condemn themselves, do you not chuse to be respected by the wise and good, to enjoy the testimony of your own conscience, and to secure the important approbation of him, who hath said, *Them that honour me, I will honour: and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed?**

4. A further motive, which yet more powerfully inclines too many to unlawful compliances, is false good nature and shame. They have so excessive a flexibility of temper, that they know not how to stand out against what the practice of the world recommends, and especially what their acquaintance invite and press them to, though they ever so clearly see the impro-

* 1 Sam. ii. 30.

priety of it, and have ever so firmly resolved the contrary. Unhappy creatures, betrayed by dispositions, almost virtuous, into vice! The truly good-natured part, would they but reflect, is to lead others in the right way, not to follow them in the wrong: the truly shameful behaviour, not to be resolute, obstinate, if tempters please to call it so, in consulting our present and future welfare. *Beware of evil, saith the son of Sirach, and be not ashamed, when it concerneth thy soul. For there is a shame, that bringeth sin: and there is a shame which is glory and grace. Accept no person against thy soul: and let not the reverence of any man cause thee to fall.** There is, that destroyeth his own soul through bashfulness, and by accepting of persons, overthroweth himself.† But they, who have the misfortune to be of this make, should by no means trust to their own most solemn purposes, or even vows. Their chief safety is in flight; in avoiding, to their utmost, such company and such things, though ever so agreeable, as may endanger their innocence: and keeping at a distance from temptation, till they can bear it better. Thus they will escape at once the uneasiness of resisting and the hazard of yielding, and increase their strength gradually by a cautious exercise of it: provided they rest not in human means only, but, with faith and humility unfeigned, apply for and depend on the divine assistance, promised through Jesus Christ; the necessity of which for every person, in every case, we presume you always understand, and for that sole reason we do not always express it.

5. With this inward weakness is commonly joined an apprehension of difficulties from without: of public dislike and censure for condemning the public taste by a different conduct; or at least of much ridi-

* Eccclus. iv. 20, 21, 22.

† Eccclus. xx. 22.

cule, a thing full as hard to be borne, for doing conscientiously what the world despises, and abstaining from what it doth without scruple. But let not the danger of censure appear to any one so frightful. Indeed if persons take absurd or indifferent observances to be great duties ; if they are strict in the performance of one duty, and grossly negligent of others ; or if to the performance of many there be added, either a vain desire of making their own goodness remarkable, or the provoking sin of uncharitableness towards others, they must not expect very favourable treatment. But an uniformly good Christian, without superstition, without affectation, and without sourness, which are surely none of them virtues, may *live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world,** bad as it is, ever so long, without any great danger, either of making himself enemies, by doing no harm and as much good as he can, or of falling into contempt, for acting only as every man in his heart knows he himself ought to act. But if ever this prove otherwise, instead of being *shaken in our minds†* by it, let us consider, how much more censure we should incur and deserve by a vicious life, to say nothing of other inconveniences : and above all, let us consider that infinitely more important censure, which both we, and our scorers, are shortly to undergo : and since, as St. Peter argues, they who *think it strange that we run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of us, shall give account to him, that is ready to judge the quick and the dead ; let us arm ourselves with this mind, that we live not our time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.‡*

As for the ridicule, which ludicrous scoffers love to throw upon religion : we may avoid much of it by

* Tit. ii. 12. † 2 Thess. ii. 2. ‡ 1 Pet. iv. 1, 2. 4, 5.

prudence, and despise the rest with ease. It falls heaviest on the pretences to piety made by the vicious ; and we shall seldom be thought such, if we are not ; or on the reservedness and formality of some, who are good. Now indeed it is never advisable to go the utmost lengths of what may, strictly speaking, be just lawful ; they adjoin so very closely on what is forbidden : yet there is a contrary extreme, an immoderate suspiciousness of innocent compliances. And they, who indulge it, lay a heavier burthen on themselves than they need, perhaps than they will support without sinking under it. But at least they rob their own minds of that serenity and chearfulness, which they might and ought to have enjoyed : they disguise religion under a gloomy uninviting appearance, which is great pity ; and furnish the profane with a grievous handle for exposing both them and it ; till perhaps they at length grow ashamed of their profession, and make a sudden exchange of their excessive rigour for the worse errors of libertinism and infidelity. Therefore, in a moderate degree, on proper occasions, let us not be backward to bear a part in such customs of the world, as we are sure we safely may : and let it, if possible, be a graceful one. On the other hand, whatever, though harmless in itself, may be a snare to us, or by our means to others, let us abstain from it indeed resolutely, but abstain with an easy air and manner : keep our reasons to ourselves, rather than be eager to mention them : or mention them, if it may do good, without exaggerating or insisting too vehemently upon any thing ; but so as may best convince men of the solidity of our judgment, and reasonableness of our conduct. Behaving thus, we may well hope to become objects, at least after a while, of respect instead of derision, to which no part of genuine

piety is on any account liable. And they, who set themselves to make a jest of it, might without difficulty, if the seriousness of their case, and sometimes pity, sometimes just indignation, did not prevent it, have that weapon turned upon them, and be proved the most absurd of all human beings. Their scrupulousness of admitting the most indubitable truths of religion; and readiness at the same time to acquiesce in the wildest imaginations, that are unfavourable to it: their schemes of making themselves easy by counteracting the dictates of their own consciences; and happy by transgressing the laws of infinite wisdom and goodness, enforced by almighty power: their delight in the hopes of existing no longer than the space of this transitory life, and their haste to ruin health, fortune and reputation, all that can afford them enjoyment, in the very beginning of life: their earnest pursuits of what they frequently despise at the time, and almost always nauseate soon after they have attained it; and the tormenting inward conflicts, that they often experience, between two passions, both of them perhaps foolish, and both pernicious, which shall be preferred: surely these things, and above all their triumphing in the wisdom of these things, and insulting those who are stupid enough to follow the rules of plain reason, and the directions of God himself from Heaven, as the best guides to their present and future well-being, might, without any great effort, be so described, as to retort on their own heads a double share of the contempt, which they are so liberal in throwing about them. But however unwilling or unfit a wise man may be to *answer fools according to their folly*,* at least he will see it to be unworthy of his notice; and go on, unconcerned, through the im-

* Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.

potent attacks of it, in the steady practice of *whatsoever things are true and honest, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report* ;* recollecting daily that awful and repeated declaration of the holy Jesus, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*† Then shall the righteous man, as the book of Wisdom beautifully expresses it, stand in great boldness before the face of such as made no account of his labours. And they repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, *This was he, whom we had some time in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools, accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is amongst the saints ! Therefore have we erred from the way of truth, and wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction. What hath our pride profited us, and what good hath our vaunting brought us ? All those things are passed away like a shadow : and as the dust that is blown away with the wind. But the righteous live for evermore : their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the Most High.*‡

* Phil. iv. 8.

† Mark viii. 38.

‡ Wisd. v.

S E R M O N XXVIII.

EPH. v. 11.

AND HAVE NO FELLOWSHIP WITH THE UNFRUITFUL WORKS
OF DARKNESS, BUT RATHER REPROVE THEM.

THE prevalence of impiety and immorality in the world, hath not only made the original duties of mankind more difficult, by increasing the temptations to transgress them, but added to their number many new obligations of great importance, relating partly to the concern of preserving ourselves, partly to the charity of guarding others, from the general infection. Our own preservation is doubtless to be the first object of our attention, as we are primarily intrusted with, and answerable for, our own persons, and have by nature the strongest solicitude for our own happiness. But zeal for that of our fellow-creatures ought certainly to fill the second place in our breasts; and is a duty much too little regarded, even by the good; considering how indispensably both religion and humanity, and indeed our common interest, require us to promote what is right and fit, and restrain each other from sin and ruin, by all such methods as we properly can. For every one is by no means qualified to use every method: and therefore, without prudent reflection, many may both labour and suffer much, without any prospect of its turning to account; nay, may involve themselves in guilt by immoderate eagerness to reform their neighbours. But, though all must con-

sult their own strength and opportunities, and leave to those who are better able, and to the providence of God, what they find themselves unequal to : there still remains to every one of us a proper share of this great work ; and we ought to be faithfully diligent, within the sphere of our influence, be it larger or smaller, to discountenance wickedness and encourage piety and virtue, by all those ways, to which God, having adapted our powers and circumstances, hath consequently called us. And as these vary greatly, so the Apostle hath given room in the text for treating of them all, by mentioning the lowest instance of due care in this respect, *having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness* ; and the highest, *reproving them*.

I. The first of these, barely not partaking in the bad actions that others commit, may seem perhaps to be scarce doing any thing for the opposite cause. And yet, as the common practice of sin is the principal plea in its favour, it is of great consequence to shew, that the practice is not universal : that there are still persons left, who fear God and love his laws, who abhor an unworthy deed, and despise a criminal pleasure. The profligate, sensible that a virtuous character is the superior one in speculation, have nothing left, but to question the reality of it in fact : and by reflecting very little, and conversing with such only, or chiefly, as are like themselves, they become by degrees almost persuaded, that all men are wicked, and cannot be otherwise. This opinion extinguishes modesty as well as deadens conscience : they triumph in their imaginary discovery, degrading as it is to human nature, and insult the vanity of those who presume to think themselves moral agents. It is lamentable to observe, how far they have succeeded in their

monstrous attempt to pervert the true order of things. While they *glory in their shame*,* too many grow ashamed of what they ought to account their glory : would wish to have their performance of religious duties and the regularity of their lives, unknown or disbelieved, or ascribed to some other motive than principle ; or, it may be, a few fashionable sins imputed to them, to save their reputations. By the influence of such preposterous bashfulness, they often become at length what they desire to seem : at least they suffer others to fall, whom the authority of their example might have supported, and confirm the profane and vicious in their wrong notions and courses. Another inducement, besides cowardice, to this improper conduct, is an abhorrence of being thought ostentatious : which hath the more weight, because in all matters, and especially in religion, whoever takes uncommon pains to make a shew, will be suspected of not having much reality. But if affectation on that hand be a fault, affectation on the other is a greater ; and the plain rule of behaviour lies between them : that every Christian go through his Christian duty with uprightness and simplicity ; neither desiring to bring the private parts of it into public view, nor labouring to make a secret of his faith and practice in cases where they would of course be seen. A natural artless procedure will as certainly vindicate itself, as dishonest contrivances will be detected. And therefore let no one fear to be thought, or, when occasion requires, to let all mankind perceive that he is rightly thought, religious and conscientious. The regulation of our appetites and passions, by reason and good sense, can never be a ground of contempt. *Doing justice and loving mercy*, is honoured throughout the

* Phil. iii. 19.

earth. And though it should be added of the same person, who lives by these rules, that he also *walks humbly with his God* :* one doth not discern, why that should lessen the good opinion pre-conceived of him ; or how those who every day with abject servility are worshipping others, no better than themselves, for trifling interests, can pretend to think it meanness in him, that he honours and adores the Maker and Judge of all. Nay, let it be said further, that he adores him suitably to the directions laid down in Scripture ; and, conscious of his own ignorance, guilt, and weakness, is willing thankfully to accept instruction, pardon, assistance, and eternal life, the free gifts of his heavenly Father, on the Giver's terms, through faith in the merits of Jesus Christ, and the grace of the Holy Spirit ; still who hath a right to blame him, unless he can prove, which no one ever hath done or will, that this is not the way to happiness here and hereafter, and that any other is ? A virtuous, a religious, a Christian character then, as it always deserves, will generally command respect : its amiableness, its importance to public, to private welfare, will be visible. And, in proportion as numbers appear possessed of it, the vicious will be awed into silence, and the modester part of them at least into outward imitation, which may produce in time, through God's grace, inward seriousness. But, however these may be affected, all the well-inclined will rejoice in the protection, and improve by the example, of such declared friends. Almost every one may do some good in this way, and possibly far more than he imagines, merely by maintaining openly an uniform tenour of pious and moral behaviour, without taking any pains to call the attention of mankind to it. But the rich, the noble, the powerful, the learned

* Mic. vi. 8.

the ingenious, the admired, those especially in whom several of these advantages are united, may, barely by manifesting themselves to be such as they ought, each of them singly reform or preserve multitudes of their inferiors ; and a number of them combined oppose and put to flight the reigning vices of the whole age in which they live.

Hence it is, that our Saviour hath laid so great a stress on the duty of *confessing him before men* ;* and exhorted his disciples thus, *Ye are the light of the world ; let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, which is in Heaven.*† Hence also St. Paul, alluding probably to the expressions of his Master, though not present when they were used, saith of those who are *blameless and harmless, the Sons of God, without rebuke, that they shine in the midst of others as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.*‡

II. After exhibiting a pattern of goodness in ourselves, our next care should be to promote in a proper manner, on all fit occasions, the esteem of whatever is good in others. The generality attend not enough to moral excellencies, and too often consider them in a wrong point of view : by which means they overlook, or sometimes conceive prejudices against, what they would else honour, and be proud to imitate. Therefore, whenever favourable opportunities present themselves, they should be instantly seized ; and the rightness, the loveliness, the beneficial fruits of each virtue shewn to such as are not yet sufficiently sensible of them : the ridicule, which hath been unjustly thrown on some duties, taken off ; and the misrepresentations, which have rendered them contemptible, rectified : the plea of excessive severity, urged against others, con-

* Matth. x. 32.

† Matth. v. 14, 16.

‡ Phil. ii. 15, 16.

futed; and the real difficulty of practising them proved to be eligible, by the shortness of its continuance, and the blessed effects of overcoming it. At the same time we should exemplify these truths, whenever we can, in the characters of the worthy: on whom we should be always endeavouring to turn the eyes of our acquaintance; to place them and their actions in an advantageous light; to vindicate them from aspersions; to convince as many as possible, how much more valuable, and conducive both to private and public welfare, a religious and honest principle is, than the most shining and envied accomplishments, when separated from it. Accordingly it should be our study to cherish and recommend such as are eminent for this merit; to support and prefer their interests; to make them known and acceptable one to another; and forward amongst them a general union, that above all things would gain them respect and success. But,

III. Whilst we are thus labouring to encourage virtue and religion, we must be extremely cautious that we obstruct not our own work, by favouring any sort of wickedness: that we never patronize, for the sake of our own gratification, what may probably tempt unguarded innocence into sin, or furnish the ill-inclined with the means of committing it: that we contribute not to raise any bad or even suspicious person to a condition of doing harm: that we protect not the guilty with our interest or power, nor varnish over their faults from considerations of private interest or friendship: but fairly suffer truth to prevail, and crimes to be detected, as they ought. For whatever particular good purposes may seem, and perhaps but seem, to be served at present by the contrary policy, they will never counterbalance the general mischiefs arising from it. Further, we must not pay court to, or

delight in, the vicious, for the sake of some wit and pleasantry, some superficial agreeableness, that sets off their vices: we must never even seem to look on either villainy or debauchery, as objects of mirth only; extol the entertaining qualities of him, that ruins others by them; or the abilities of the man, that uses them to his neighbour's wrong. Else we shall teach those around us to esteem and emulate them: indeed we shall accustom ourselves to regard such characters as accomplished and respectable, not as detestable; and come, at length, instead of pitying, to despise and ridicule those who suffer by them: thus wickedly augmenting the triumph of the one, and the affliction of the other. David mentions it amongst the distinguishing marks of him, who *shall abide in the Tabernacle of the Lord, and dwell in his holy hill, that in his eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them, that fear the Lord.** And St. Paul seems to make it in some sense a less crime for a man to live immorally himself, than to rejoice in others that live so: *who, knowing the judgment of God, saith he, that they, which commit such things, are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.*† We have from nature strong appetites and passions in our corrupted frame, which tempt us so vehemently, and hurry us often so suddenly into some sins, that perhaps we may not be altogether void of excuse. But there is no original principle within us, that leads us coolly and deliberately to approve them in others. This therefore can only proceed from a peculiar and wilful depravation of heart, equivalent to what might be produced by many repeated acts of transgression.

And here it must be observed, that voluntary inti-

* Psal. xv. 1, 4.

† Rom. i. 32.

macy with the wicked is one degree of shewing countenance to them, and ought to be avoided. Sometimes, indeed, nearness of relation, connections in business, the necessities of affairs : at others, common civility and decency of behaviour, which, though a weaker tie, it may be very unadvisable to break through, oblige us to keep up acquaintances of this sort. And indeed what St. Paul observes of the Heathens of his days, that if a man would not *company with* the grossly wicked amongst them, *he must needs go out of the world,** is become too true even of the professed Christians of ours. Besides, a reasonable prospect of reforming the faulty may justify one, especially of known and confirmed virtue, in conversing much with them, and being, what our Saviour was very truly, though maliciously, called, *a friend of publicans and sinners.†* But to affect, or even permit, beyond what such reasons require, either friendships or familiarities with habitual transgressors of the laws of God, is on many accounts unallowable. On our own account we should resolve against it, for the sake of our good name : which, in a world so censorious, it is difficult enough to preserve, by the discreetest behaviour, unsullied ; and therefore we must not hope to escape, if by ill-chosen company we give real ground for a bad opinion of us in some degree ; and too fair a pretence for carrying it farther than probably we deserve. And yet how soon we may come, by such imprudences, to deserve a much worse opinion than we apprehend, cannot be foreseen : considering, how prone both to imitation and to wickedness the human heart is, and how much this propensity must be increased, when we place crimes before it in so alluring a light, as that of their being practised without any scruple by our daily

* 1 Cor. v. 9, 10.

† Matth. xi. 19.

agreeable associates. But were we ever so secure in all respects, there is a dignity belonging to piety and virtue, which ought to be supported; and is betrayed, when we mix unnecessarily with the profligate and abandoned: whom besides we thus make easy and harden in their unlawful courses; nay, give them also the public credit of being regarded by us, and well with us; which may enable them to do we know not what harm. Besides, by such undistinguishing treatment of men, we disqualify ourselves from shewing that preference to the worthy, which is their due; and lead others, more or less, to slight the difference of characters, and, in probable consequence, the notions of right and wrong. *That be far from thee, to do after this manner; as Abraham speaks on another occasion: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee.**

To such degree then, as every one can, he ought to avoid the very appearance of these improper attachments: or, if he hath failed in point of precaution, must immediately think of the means of disengaging himself. Sometimes a steady adherence to our duty is enough to effect it: and such persons grow weary of an acquaintance, whose conduct reproves them, and whose ears are deaf to their solicitations. But if that proves otherwise; and either the scandalousness of their lives, or imminent danger of being at length perverted by them, requires a more speedy and abrupt step to be taken, we shall do well, on some flagrant occasion, to renounce all commerce with them at once: which, at the same time that it sets us free, may possibly make on them, by the strength of the shock, a salutary impression. Where the familiarity either cannot or ought not to be broken off, the

* Gen. xviii. 25.

degree of it, however, may be so moderated, or such exceptions to it contrived in particular instances, that, paying strictly all due regard to them, we may be known to disapprove what they do amiss: stand at a visible distance from the faults of those to whom we are nearest; and be, like our blessed Lord, *holy, harmless, and undefiled, separate from sinners*,* though we preserve, when called to it, a course of easy demeanour in the midst of them. In proportion as our situation will permit us to vary our deportment from time to time, we may withhold from them, when any enormities of theirs demand it, the usual frankness and cheerfulness of our conversation; and restore it on the prospect of their amendment: we may also, and should, be watchful to express our delight in every right action they perform; to signify inoffensively the affliction we suffer when they misbehave; and thus move their good-nature, if any be left in them, to give us pleasure, not pain, while we so evidently wish them well. But still sometimes neither these nor the preceding methods can be tried, at others they are sure or likely to prove ineffectual: and therefore,

IV. We must have recourse to that, which the Apostle specifies in the last words of the text, *reproving them*. Various persons, indeed, on various accounts, we cannot *reprove for their works of darkness*: either having no access to them, or no title to use that freedom. Or at most, we can only convey oblique reproof under some agreeable, or however inoffensive, disguise; or make a small advance upon the borders of plain speech, observing well on which side they are most accessible, and watching for the seasons, when good dispositions either prevail or may be excited. Nor should we neglect any one of these honest

* Heb. vii. 26.

artifices ; for the skilful application of them may possibly enable us to gain ground, by unperceived degrees, on their inordinate passions and bad habits ; and thus carry them such lengths towards reformation, as we should in vain have attempted, had they at first perceived the whole of our design.

But, in many cases, more direct and home remonstrances to the faulty are necessary : which, therefore, such, as with propriety can, are bound to make ; and, whatever reluctance they may find to so painful a work, must as the Scripture directs, *in any wise rebuke their neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him* : for omitting it is in the same place interpreted to be *hating him in their heart*.^{*} Timely admonition may stop him short just at the entrance upon a wrong course, and snatch him out of imminent hazard unhurt. Even those, who are farther gone, may yet be recalled, by a lively representation of their guilt and danger, of which, perhaps, they had a very inadequate, if any, apprehension. But then we must be very careful, unless we would intirely lose all influence, both at present and for the future, that we never bring a charge without having incontestable proof of its truth ; that a genuine friendly concern be evidently the principle of all we say ; that we express more sorrow than anger, where circumstances will allow it : as they peculiarly do, where the person blamed hurts himself more than any one else : that we use tender expostulations by choice ; and harsh expressions, but above all, terrifying and threatening ones, only when nothing else will prevent ruin. For this is, doubtless, the meaning of the Apostle's rule : *of some have compassion, making a difference ; others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire*.[†] And even where the

^{*} Lev. xix. 17.

[†] Jude 22, 23.

strongest marks of disapprobation and displeasure are needful, they should ever be shown without insult or haughtiness, without the least appearance of loving to reprimand, without exaggerating any thing, or treating the frailties of human nature too severely : indeed with such attention to acknowledge and point out whatever in the general character of the person concerned is valuable, or in the particular circumstances of the case excusable, as may reconcile him, if possible, to the liberties taken with him, by the conviction that they are taken unwillingly.

Many other precautions, for the better success of this good work, every one's prudence will suggest to him in the several instances that come before him, according to the nature of the offence, the temper of the offender, and especially the degree of authority which the reprover hath over him. Sometimes all authority is best laid aside, and softened into mere persuasion : sometimes a moderate share of its weight is wanted, to bear down a less complying disposition : at others, its whole force is little enough to fetter a stubborn spirit. Here then we must each of us think and act for ourselves : but with this consideration ever present to our minds, that not only a total neglect of this duty, but a neglect of discharging it in the most effectual manner that is incumbent on us, will be imputed to us for guilt ; as it was in the case of Eli ; who having contented himself with gently blaming his sons, for what he ought absolutely to have forbidden them, and deterred them from, *I will judge his house for ever*, said God, *for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.**

When, therefore, mild representations have small

* 1 Sam. iii. 13.

effect, rougher treatment must be used. And if the offender grows hardened to private remonstrances, it becomes needful to apply the severer discipline of more open censure. Possibly he may yet retain sensibility enough to be moved by that: for which reason our Saviour appoints, that we observe a gradation: first, *tell our brother his faults, between us and him alone*; then *take with us one or two more*; and, lastly, *tell it unto the Church*;* let the whole number of good persons, with whom we are both of us connected, try their interest with him. And if even that fail, and no hope at all remain of him; yet by-standers at least will thus both be put on their guard against suffering by him, and warned against imitating him. Therefore St. Paul directs: *them that sin*, doubtless meaning obstinately, *rebuke before all, that others also may fear*.† Indeed were every one to be exposed for each misbehaviour of which he is guilty, or even all such as he doth not immediately reform; this procedure would be unchristian and inhuman: many good persons would pass in common esteem for very bad; and many blameable ones, but of whose recovery there is room for great hope, would be driven to despair of regaining any character, and lay aside the thought of growing better. But there is no need of being so tender about the reputations of those, who are totally abandoned to sin. On the contrary, it is of importance to the world, that they should be known for what they are: and not enabled to pass themselves upon mankind for worthy characters, by receiving the same regards with such in common speech and behaviour. *He that saith unto the wicked, thou art righteous, him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him. But, to them that rebuke him, shall be delight, and a good*

* Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17.

† 1 Tim. v. 20.

*blessing shall come upon them.** There is frequently no other weapon left against such persons, but public infamy. The punishments of human laws in multitudes of cases cannot reach them. Those of a future life some have brought themselves to doubt: many to overlook. But to the dislike and abhorrence of mankind few or none can be insensible: and every one that deserves it should be made to feel that he doth. Wickedness is the great disturber of the world: the bane of all peace and comfort, civil and domestic. Therefore every one hath a natural right to stand up and declare against it: a claim, that the disgrace which belongs to it, be inflicted on it. And in this cause good men should act with spirit; assume the authority, in which their character will support them; and not suffer guilt, which is by nature timorous and cowardly, to lift up its head: they should unite in the common concern of opposing its progress; and as the prophet expresses it, *be valiant for the truth upon the earth.†* A zeal, shewn uniformly by the virtuous against vice and that alone; kept free from all mixture of personal resentment or private interest; appearing by the steps which it takes, not to proceed from moroseness of temper, but from principle, and conducted by a moderate share of prudence, will easily rescue itself from wrong interpretations, secure to itself reverence from the world in general; and produce much good, without proportionable hazard or difficulty.

It must, however, be confessed, that neither is every one qualified equally for such a work; some, by nature, being little capable of exerting themselves, or moving others, and some again of so warm passions, that they must not allow them scope, even in the best cause: nor will the situation and connections of every

* Prov. xxiv. 24, 25.

† Jer. ix. 3.

one always by any means permit him to appear against ill actions and ill people in the manner that he could wish. Yet no one is left without the means of doing somewhat towards it : and all that we are able to do, without neglecting other obligations, is our duty. Whoever can look with just the same eye on good and bad, provided his own present advantage be out of the question, hath no love of religion, or virtue in him. And whoever takes no notice of the difference will be shrewdly suspected of not seeing or not regarding it. The coolest spectator of other wrong things that are done thinks immediately, when any happen to affect himself, that all ought to interest themselves on his behalf, indeed can hardly do it too much. And therefore, when things are done, which affect the happiness of others, the welfare of society, the honour of our Maker, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier, we ought to interest ourselves for these. Perhaps we may object, that our concern would be fruitless. And so, perhaps, was that of David, when he said, *rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law. My zeal hath even consumed me, because they forget thy words.** But certainly so was that of just Lot, who, *dwelling among the inhabitants of Sodom, in seeing and hearing vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.†* Yet they are proposed as objects, not to blame, but praise. And indeed uneasy sentiments on such occasions, however ineffectual otherwise, may improve us considerably, by reminding us, *that we are of God, and the world lieth in wickedness ;‡* provided we carefully restrain them, which itself will be a profitable inward exercise, from running into excess. Besides, whoever preserves this due medium between indifference and vehemence, as

* Psal. cxix. 136, 139.

† 2 Pet. ii. 8.

‡ 1 John v. 19.

he will be always prudently seeking methods of reclaiming, or at least of checking the guilty, and consequently of securing the innocent; so he will find more than any one else can suggest to him: and though hated by the bad, or despised by the thoughtless, for this troublesome activity, will be esteemed by many fellow-labourers, many converts whom he hath helped to make, many ready to fall, whom he hath seasonably stayed and strengthened. Or let him have ever so much cause to say in other respects, *I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought: yet surely his judgment is with the Lord, and his work with his God.**

* Isaiah xlix. 4.

S E R M O N XXIX.

LAM. iii. 40.

LET US SEARCH AND TRY OUR WAYS, AND TURN AGAIN
TO THE LORD.

THE gracious and wise Creator of all things, as he hath made known to every creature, by a secret instinct, the way of life which belongs to its frame and condition: so to man *he hath shewn*, both by his affections and his understanding, *what is good, and what he requires of him*. Yet having placed him in a state of trial, in which these inward principles might be perverted and mislead him, he hath graciously super-added external manifestations of his will for our surer and completer guidance: thus making our rule of duty evident and obligatory in the highest degree. No course of action is more plainly suited to the nature of any agent, than religion and virtue is to ours. For what can be more evidently natural, than for a reasonable being to make reason his governing principle; for a social being *to do justly, and love mercy*; and for a created one *to walk humbly with his God*?* Agreeably therefore to this peculiar destination, which allots to us employments worthy to fill up an eternal existence, whereas inferior animals arrive very soon, without contributing almost any thing to it themselves, at the small perfection of which they are capable, and there stop: man is qua-

* Micah vi. 8.

lified, and, as revelation fully assures us, designed, for endless improvement in goodness and happiness, but such as shall depend on his own care and industry, excited and assisted by the grace of God.

For this purpose, together with an inward perception of what is right and fit for us to do, and what is otherwise, we have also a faculty of self-reflection, which, presenting us to our own view, shews us, what we have been and are. The exercise of this faculty is expressed in the text by *searching and trying our ways*; and elsewhere by *examining and proving ourselves*,* and *knowing the thoughts of our hearts*;† which phrases have their peculiar import and use. For as the temper and state of our hearts is the great thing that we have to be concerned about in religion: so the consideration of our ways, or the actions in which our temper is exerted and shewn, must discover to us the motives that influence it: just as, in the material objects that surround us, we learn, from particular facts and appearances, the general laws by which the frame of things is governed.

This faculty of moral reflection, and the self-approbation or dislike arising from it, which we commonly call by the name of *conscience*, is the character that distinguishes man from the beings below him: it is the principle that God hath endued with an evident right to direct our lives: and, according as we employ or disregard it, we shall advance or go back in real religion.

The seeds of every virtue were planted in the soul of man originally, each in its due order and proportion, without any mixture of evil. Yet even then, for want of due cultivation by our first parents, they were fatally blasted, instead of growing up to the perfection for which they were designed. But now, when our

* 1 Cor. xi. 28. 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

† Dan. ii. 30.

inward frame is so unhappily disordered and weakened by their fall, watchfulness over it is become unspeakably more necessary than it was at first. And since, with a nature thus prone to err, we are a considerable time from our birth before we reflect on our actions at all, and, after that, do it very imperfectly ; it cannot fail, but our own bad inclinations, and the customs of a bad world, must have led us all aside, more or less, from the right path, before we knew distinctly which it was. Nor have we, many of us, it may be feared, made so early or so effectual an use, as we might, of the faculty of self-government, in that season of warm and hasty passions which quickly follows the first considerable use of reason. And, if not, we may be still surer of finding many things within us that want correction.

A great part of those around us, we see, are quite wicked. And in the few that are seriously good, the most superficial observer and most charitable interpreter will discern a great number of faults and imperfections unreformed. Since therefore failures in point of duty are, from the nature of the thing, to be apprehended, and have in fact happened to all the rest of the world : if we were not usually, by a most preposterous kind of negligence, less attentive to ourselves than to others, we should be likely to perceive the most disorders in that breast, with which we have the most opportunities of being intimately acquainted. But, at least, there is ground enough for us to examine, what our state really is : *to search and try our ways ; that if we have erred in any thing, we may turn again to the Lord.*

And though it is very apparent that such a resolution may have many good consequences, and can have no bad ones, if executed in the manner which every

man's reason, and the word of God, will suggest to him : yet, for your further encouragement and direction, I shall lay before you particularly,

I. The advantages that may arise from this inquiry.

II. The chief things requisite for performing it aright.

I. The advantages that may arise from it.

A considerable part of the wrong conduct of mankind proceeds, not so much from any strong inclination to do amiss, as from being so unhappily thoughtless, that the slightest motive is enough to determine their choice any way. We engage at first in this or that sort of behaviour, we scarce know why or how : then go on of course in the way we have set out in, without ever thinking whither it leads us ; and by use grow fond of it, and zealous for it ; yet are too indolent all the while once to ask ourselves, perhaps, whether we are aiming at any thing ; or, however, whether it be at what we ought ; or something of little importance, if not hurtful or criminal. Now this case, without reflection, is quite irrecoverable ; and a little reflection in time would easily set all right. Nay, even where vehement passions hurry persons into follies and sins, it was for want of this wholesome discipline at first, that their passions gained the mastery ; and applying it steadily for some time will be a sure means, through God's blessing, of reducing them again to subjection. For there is no possibility, either of viewing a bad action, in a full light, without abhorrence, or of weighing its consequences without terror. Wickedness, therefore, always banishes thought, and piety and virtue encourage it. A good man, far from being driven to hide his inward condition from himself, though he find many things that want still to be amended, yet finds at the same time so many, which,

through the aid of God's holy Spirit, are already grown, and daily growing better, that he feels no joy equal to that of his heart telling him, what he is. But the guilty mind is driven by fear and shame to stifle the voice of nature and conscience, that struggles in the breast for utterance. *Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd: but he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.** And therefore the Psalmist speaks of self-amendment, as the immediate fruit of self-inspection. *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies: I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.†*

Nor doth it only excite in us good resolutions, but furnishes directions how to put them in practice. Reflection will shew us, and nothing else can, by what defect within, or what opportunity without, each of our faults got ground in our breasts: and which is the way to root it out again. For want of this knowledge, multitudes try in vain to correct the disorders of their hearts and lives; and only here and there one recovers, as it were by force of constitution; whilst numbers perish, who might have been preserved by a competent acquaintance with the method of cure. For every single case requires to be in some degree differently treated; and must therefore in order to it, be particularly studied. Strong resolutions indeed may sometimes do a great deal: but very often strength, unassisted by skill, wastes itself to no purpose, and the bad success of vehement efforts ill-directed, leaves little ability, and less heart, for further endeavours.

Another use of searching frequently into our past

* John iii. 20, 21.

† Psal. cxix. 59, 60.

ways is to preserve ourselves from the secret approach of future dangers. The first deviation from their duty is in most persons but small ; and its progress, for some time, gentle and unnoticed by themselves ; till they have insensibly gone such a length, that they are tempted to despair of being able to return. And therefore attending to little errors is the safest method to prevent great ones. But even where we have yet been guilty of none, observation will shew us many tendencies that we have to sin ; many weak and exposed places in our minds, unlikely to withstand the assaults, that must be expected in such a world as this. And hence we shall be forewarned to avoid the temptations that will endanger us ; to prepare ourselves for such, as we cannot avoid ; and strengthen our inward frame with such care, that it may be proof against the various accidents of life.

Till this is done in some good degree, reflection, though always of the highest use, will often be very unpleasing, by setting before our eyes the disagreeable view of our faults. But when we have tolerably well reformed and fortified our minds, then the exercise of it will grow delightful, every day beyond other. And when once we can say to ourselves, on sure grounds, that *we have fought the good fight,** and gotten the victory, and have only the scattered remains of the enemy left to pursue and destroy ; how inexpressible will the satisfaction be, to enjoy the approbation of our own hearts, and the consciousness of God's favour ; to look back and see the dangers, from which we are escaped ; to feel within, that a temper of piety and virtue is indeed the happiness of man ; and experience the continual increase of that temper, continually diminishing our burthens and sorrows, and

* 2 Tim. iv. 7.

opening to us new scenes of enjoyment, to which we were strangers before !

All these are general advantages flowing from the practice of self-inspection. But in many cases it hath a yet more especial good influence. A distinct knowledge of ourselves will greatly secure us from the ill effects of flattery, which would persuade us that we are what we feel we are not ; and enable us to bear unjust reproach, thinking it *a very small thing that we should be judged of man's judgment*, when we can reflect with comfort, that *he who judgeth us is the Lord*.* Experience of our infirmities will teach us humility, and move us to compassion and forgiveness, according to the Apostle's direction : *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted*.† Experience where our strength, as well as our weakness lies, will shew us, how we are best able to serve God and our fellow-creatures ; what we may attempt, what will be too much for us. And strict observation of our own hearts will qualify us, beyond all things, to give useful cautions to others, and direct their steps in the right way.

But, in order to receive these or any benefits from self-inquiry, there are

II. Some rules to be observed for conducting it properly.

Of these the fundamental one is, that we consider it as a religious duty ; perform it as in the presence of God : and earnestly beg him, to shew us in a true light to ourselves. *Who can tell how oft he offendeth ? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults*.‡ *Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart : prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well, if there be*

* 1 Cor. iv. 3.

† Gal. vi. 1.

‡ Psal. xix. 12.

*any way of wickedness in me : and lead me in the way everlasting.** A serious regard to the most awful, and yet most gracious of Beings, will be a constant preservative against all the errors, however opposite, to which we are liable in this matter.

Some are so very sensible before-hand of their own condition in general, that they are afraid of examining into it particularly : or, if they do begin the enquiry, they have not courage to carry it on. For the more we reflect on our faults, the more we must feel that shame and remorse, which God hath placed in our minds, as he hath done the sense of pain in our bodies, to restrain us from proceeding in what would destroy us. Now most persons are willing to recover their bodily health, how much soever they suffer in the cure : but to regain a right state of soul, on which all depends, they will bear nothing. So, because their condition is bad, they let it go on to be daily worse ; rather than have the uneasiness of thinking of it, to make it better. Yet neglecting to look into our worldly affairs because we think them desperate, every one owns to be wrong : and must it not then be infinitely more so in our eternal concerns, which can never be desperate, but from our refusing to look into them ? As soon, therefore, as any one finds an aversion to self-inquiry beginning, he should instantly break through it, set about the work, and never stop till he hath finished it. For then is the season of trial, that in all likelihood may determine his state for ever after. The aversion will increase, if we yield to it ; and the habit of sin grow stronger : the next effort will be still more uneasy, and consequently fainter, than the present ; and all will end in a total despair of becoming what we ought. Yet, at the same time, we

* Psal. cxxxix. 23 24.

must reflect now and then, whether we will or not : and may, even by transient thoughts, undergo more pain to no purpose, than would have wrought a cure. But should any thing happen, as many may, to awaken us into a full and lasting view of our condition, when perhaps we may be so far enslaved to sin, as to practise it on, with our eyes open to all its horrors ; this would be a dreadful scene indeed. Or could we be so fatally successful, as to banish thought intirely ; it would only be losing the sense of part of our misery, and with it, all hope of happiness.

Let us therefore neither be too tender, nor too proud, to bear inspecting our hearts and lives : and, that we may bear it well, let us learn to moderate, if we have need, the uneasiness which it may give us. For every passion that we have may be raised so high, as to defeat its own end. And though we can dislike nothing so justly, as our faults ; and very few dislike them near enough ; yet if we dislike ourselves for them too much to have patience to think of them, and mend them ; that runs into a new fault : and we should check ourselves for it, mildly indeed, but very carefully ; considering well both our natural frailty, and our Maker's goodness : but especially the promises of forgiveness and grace, which he hath recorded for our use in his holy word : not in order to reconcile us at all to sin, but in a reasonable degree to ourselves. And how mortifying soever a needful examination may still prove, it is surely worth while to support the most painful reflections for the present, when it will secure us a succession of pleasing and happy ones ever after ; and verify that encouraging account, which the Son of Sirach hath given of this whole matter : *Wisdom exalteth her children, and layeth hold of them that seek her. He that holdeth her fast shall inherit glory :*

*and wheresoever she enters, the Lord will bless.—At first she will walk with him by crooked ways, and bring fear and dread upon him, and torment him with her discipline ; until she may trust his soul, and try him by her laws. Then will she return the strait way unto him, and comfort him, and shew him her secrets. But if he go wrong, she will forsake him, and give him over to his own ruin. Observe the opportunity, and beware of evil.**

But most persons are in the contrary extreme to this over-great sensibility ; and by no means apprehend sufficiently, *what spirit they are of,*† or what lives they have led. The course of behaviour to which we are inclined, especially if we have fallen into it early, and find others do not scruple it, we are very unwilling to suspect of any thing wrong ; very apt to stifle our suspicions, if they rise ; and to take it much amiss, if others intimate their judgment of, what surely we ought to understand best, our own conduct. Therefore, before we can at all depend on the good opinion we may entertain of ourselves, we should ask our hearts, and make them answer honestly : Have we searched our ways at all ? Have we searched the whole of them ? And have we done it with impartiality and diligence ? Or winked a little, where we did not care to look ; forgot a few things, that we had no pleasure in remembering ; and coloured over what we found, without it, would appear disagreeable ? A fond affection, even to others, can make us wonderfully blind to their defects : and much more may it in our own case. So that, unless we have examined with great accuracy, though *we know nothing by ourselves, yet are we not thereby justified :*‡ and what we may call the testimony of our conscience, may be given so unfairly as

* Eccles. iv. 11—20.

† Luke ix. 55.

‡ 1 Cor. iv. 4.

to be of no weight. *For if a man prove himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man PROVE his own work, and then he shall have rejoicing in himself.** Let us, therefore, carry always in our minds the instructive remark of Solomon, that *every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord pondereth the hearts.†* And let us be careful so to ponder and judge our own hearts now, that we may be able, through the mercy procured for us by our blessed Redeemer, to stand his final judgment hereafter.

Nor must we examine only into the weak and suspicious parts of our characters and conduct; but those which procure us the most applause from others and ourselves: for want of which even vices, a little disguised, may pass upon us for great virtues; and we may be doing with intire satisfaction, what we should abhor if we understood it right. This is the way to grow in love with our faults, instead of correcting them; and therefore we should often call to mind that surprizing, but too common, character of the Church of Laodicea; *Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.‡*

Nor are these general grounds of caution the only ones; but every person will find, on inquiry, particular reasons for being watchful and distrustful of himself in some point or other; arising, perhaps, from unhappy experience of failures, at least from conviction of the dangers incident to his natural disposition, age, employment, company; and, which is a matter of no small consideration, rank in the world. For they above all, should be careful in searching their own

* Gal. vi. 3, 4.

† Prov. xxi. 2.

‡ Rev. iii. 17.

breasts, whose higher condition subjects them most to flattery, and removes them farthest from hearing censure.

But though it is very uncommon for persons to carry their suspicions of themselves far enough, yet we may carry them too far ; especially if we examine ourselves as it may be most people do, only or chiefly when we are under some strong degree of sorrow or fear. For then we shall be apt not only to suffer groundless uneasiness, by thinking much too ill of our present state, which is by no means a duty : but to despair, and lay aside the endeavour of becoming better, which would be a destructive error. The proper time for self-inspection, therefore, is, when we are in the calmest and evenest state of mind, neither careless and presumptuous, nor terrified and desponding. And we should often repeat the work, place ourselves and our actions in different points of view, and compare the result of our several observations, that one may rectify or confirm another. Nor will it be at all sufficient to see what we have been and are, without consulting the word of God, as well as our own consciences, which may else misguide us, to learn what we ought to be. And though it would be an unhappy weakness to affright or entangle ourselves, by imagining the rule of our duty stricter than it is ; yet it may be a fatal mistake to flatter ourselves, by imagining it less strict : and the plain way is, first to judge it reasonably and uprightly, then to try our condition by it impartially and frequently. The more constant we are in doing this, the easier, the more beneficial, the more satisfactory, it will be : whereas long intervals will only give time for ill habits to strengthen and multiply, till we shall have no heart to attempt a reformation of them.

And though the closest attendance on this duty may, at present, be far from producing all the good fruit we could wish, it should never discourage us from proceeding in what we know to be necessary. Beginnings in almost every thing are laborious and imperfect: and we make a slow progress at first even in what afterwards we come to excel in. The smallest step we can take towards self-amendment is advancing somewhat towards happiness: and if our zeal continue, our difficulties will assuredly lessen, and our proficiency grow quicker. For though *of ourselves we can do nothing* ;* yet *God giveth power to the faint ; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength. They that wait on the Lord shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*†

And as the worst of men ought not to give up themselves as incapable of becoming good, nor those in the lowest rank of goodness to despair of becoming eminent in time ; so neither should those who are in the highest indulge too great a complacency in their own improvements ; much less a contempt of others, or an imagination, which the great Apostle disclaims, *as though they had already attained, either were already perfect.* But the common duty of all, to express it in his following words, is, *forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, to press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*‡ Which that we may all obtain, he of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

* John xv. 5. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

† Is. xl. 29, 31.

‡ Phil. iii. 12, 13, 14.

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